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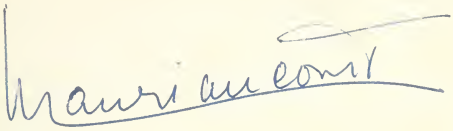

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M. EMILE ZOLÆ.

From a photograph taken during his visit to London on September 29th 1893.

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A BIOGRAPHICAL & CRITICAL STUDY

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PREFACE

I WISH to express here my indebtedness to M. PAUL ALEXIS, from whose biography of EMILE ZOLA, 'Notes d'un Ami,' I have, with his kind permission and that of M. GEORGE CHARPENTIER, the publisher of his interesting work, largely drawn in writing this book. I have also to express my very best thanks to M. HENRI CÉARD for very valuable assistance afforded. But, of course, my greatest debt is to M. EMILE ZOLA himself, who for some years past has honoured me with his acquaintance, to whom I have never addressed myself in vain for advice or information, and who, with great readiness, gave me every assistance in his power when I assumed the pleasant task of writing this book.

ROBERT H. SHERARD.

PARIS: *September*, 1893.

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Cher monsieur, je serai à Paris lundi. Voulez-vous venir causer avec moi, rue de Bruxelles, le soir, à six heures et demie? L'idée du livre biographique dont vous me parlez, ne peut qu'être très flatteuse pour moi et je me mets entièrement à votre disposition.

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Emile Zola

EMILE ZOLA

CHAPTER I

EMILE ZOLA'S FAMILY AND BIRTH

'To the Memory of my Mother,' Emile Zola dedicates, in part, the last volume of the Rougon-Macquart series, 'Le Docteur Pascal,' 'the *résumé* and the conclusion of my whole work.' Emilie Aubert was the maiden name of the lady whose only son and child was destined, after unparalleled struggles, to become the most striking figure in the literary world during the last half of the nineteenth century. She was only nineteen when she married François Zola, and is described by those who knew her at that time as a woman of remarkable sweetness and simplicity of character, and endowed with very great personal beauty. Her parents were people of no fortune, who lived at Dourdan, in the Department of Seine-et-Oise, not very far from Paris, and her marriage—for she had no dowry—was a pure

marriage of love—the exception, not the rule, in the marryings and givings in marriage in France. Emile Zola's father was at that time a man of forty-three years of age. François Zola was by his father an Italian, and by his mother a Greek, the latter being from Corfu, his father's family being natives of Venice, where to this day are many who are proud to claim kinship with the great writer who bears their name.

François Zola was not a successful man. He had great plans and high ideals, but was prevented by circumstances from executing the former and from realising the latter. As a very young man he fought under Napoleon, after the fall of whom he became a civil engineer. It is interesting to note, by those who, like Emile Zola himself, believe in the theory of atavism, that François Zola already, at an early age, displayed considerable literary ability, publishing various works connected with his profession, one of which, a certain 'Trattato di nivellazione,' written, as were his other works, in his mother-tongue, attracted considerable attention, procuring for its author his nomination as member of the Royal Academy of Padua, and an honorific distinction at the hands of the King of Holland. It was in disgust with the Austrian rule that the young Venetian expatriated himself, and then began for him a life of wandering which, to a certain extent Bohemian in

its impulses, contrasts strongly with the phenomenally quiet and sedate life which has been led by his son. After wandering about in Germany,[1] where he collaborated on the construction of the first German railways, François Zola visited Holland, whence he passed to England. In 1830 he was in Algeria, where for a while he abandoned his profession, taking a commission as captain in the foreign legion and serving with distinction. After the disbanding of this regiment he sailed for France, landing in Marseilles, which from its very nature at once won the heart of this son of Italy and of Greece. He decided to fix himself here, to make Marseilles his home, and, returning again to his profession, opened an office as a consulting civil engineer. At that time, at the age of forty, François Zola was endowed with the same capacities for Herculean industry which he transmitted in so marked a degree to his only son. Unfortunately for him, his industry was less well-applied than has been that of his descendant. A certain tinge of romanticism, which many profess to be able to trace in Emile Zola, also seems to have pervaded his character, and to have combated the chances of success to which, in other ways, he was certainly entitled. He was a man of large views, of immense

[1] In the *Journal de Paris* for January 16, 1830, appears, under the heading 'Our Munich Correspondent Writes,' a brief allusion to one of M. François Zola's enterprises. The name is mis-spelt 'Zolo.'

conceptions, a builder of pyramids, but, unlike his son, unwilling to produce his pyramids brick by brick, stone upon stone. Almost immediately after his arrival at Marseilles, he conceived the plan of endowing Marseilles with no less a construction than an entirely new harbour, at that time greatly wanted by the busy port. He at once set to work, produced plans and maps, travelled to Paris to lay his idea before the competent authorities, and had the mortification of seeing himself superseded by a more fortunate competitor. The plans and maps which he designed for this immense scheme, and which are now in the possession of his son, were all that remained to him for close upon three years of labour. Undiscouraged—discouragement being unknown to the exuberant Zola temperament—François Zola cast about for something else to which to apply his energies. Some thirty kilomètres from Marseilles, approached at that time by diligence only, lies Aix, which it may here be stated is the Plassans of Zola's novels. Aix, like all the rest of Provence, suffered bitterly at that time from want of water. Drought is in summer the curse of this lovely country, and on no subject is Daudet, that other Provençal, perhaps more eloquent, than when speaking of the *arida nutrix*, who reared him and his glorious brother in letters. 'It was our great joy as children,' he once said to me, 'to go and meet the train which brought

the washerwomen home from the Rhone, and to stand where they would pass us with their damp bundles slung over their backs. The smell of the water was the most delicious thing that we could think of.'

There were only three fountains, at the time of François Zola's visit to Aix, in the town, and of these, in the summer months, only one performed its functions. The water, moreover, was tepid and almost unfit for use. François Zola determined that here was scope for his activity. He would endow Aix with a copious water-supply, and this by means of such a canal as he had often seen in Germany, a canal with locks, which, starting from an artificial reservoir, which he proposed to create at a distance of three kilomètres from the town, would bring a plentiful supply of mountain and rain water to the parched city. It was to this work that Zola devoted his life; it was whilst engaged in this work that he met his death. Innumerable difficulties were placed in his path. Your provincial Frenchman is notoriously conservative, your Provençal, where he is not ardently active, is inertia itself. The good people of Aix would not hear of the canal. Aix had got along for centuries with the then existing water-supply, why should any change be made? The constitution of a company to provide the necessary funds involved months of labour, innumerable diligence journeys from Aix to Marseilles and from Marseilles to Aix,

and from Aix to Paris. It was in the course of one of these journeys to Paris that François Zola met his future wife. Her beauty, her sweetness, her simplicity at once captivated the heart of the engineer, and for the few weeks that were all their courtship the canal was forgotten, only to be taken up again with renewed ardour directly after the marriage, which took place in 1839. Madame Zola accompanied her husband to Provence, encouraging him in his scheme, sharing his feverish runnings to and fro, and never once saying a single word such as might have been expected from a woman's caution about a plan which almost everybody described as Utopian and unrealisable.

It was during one of the visits to Paris that Emile Zola was born. His father had returned to the capital to try and gain over to his side such influences as he hoped would enable him to overcome the prejudice and routine of the local authorities at Aix. Foreseeing that this task would be a lengthy one, and his wife being at that time near to her confinement, he leased a fourth floor in the rue St. Joseph, and summarily furnished the same. The rent paid for this fourth floor, as rents were at that time in Paris, shows that François Zola was possessed of a certain affluence, the sum paid being twelve hundred francs per annum. Contrasted to other homes which Emile Zola afterwards dwelt in during his years of struggle,

this fourth floor in the rue St. Joseph must appear a very palace.

It was in number 10 of this street that Emile Zola was born on April 2, 1840.[1] The rue St. Joseph, by a coincidence, is a street of houses where the trade in literature, or at any rate in the products of the printing press, is almost exclusively engaged in. It is a cross between our London Fleet Street and Paternoster Row; for, whilst one end is the centre of the wholesale newspaper trade, the other is occupied by a number of publishing houses. It is another coincidence, and to some extent an exemplification of the irony of fate, that number 10 is also the address of a publisher who exclusively publishes books of a highly moral order.

[1] The following is a copy from the register of births of the 3rd arrondissement of Paris, Zola's 'acte de naissance.' It is given in the original French :—

'L'an 1840 le 4 avril, à deux heures un quart de relevée, par devant nous Barthélemy-Benoît Decau, chevalier de la Legion d'honneur, maire du 3me. arrondissement de Paris, faisant fonctions d'officier de l'état civil, a comparu le sieur François-Antoine-Joseph-Marie Zola, ingénieur civil, âgé de quarante-quatre ans, demeurant à Paris rue Saint-Joseph 10 bis, lequel nous a présenté un enfant masculin, né avant-hier à onze heures du soir en sa demeure, fils de lui comparant et de Françoise-Emilie Aubert, son épouse, mariés à Paris en la mairie du 1er. arrondissement le seize mars 1839, auquel enfant il a donné les prénoms d'Emile, Edouard, Charles, Antoine, fait en présence des sieurs Norbert Lecerf, marchand épicier, âgé de 52 ans, demeurant à Paris, rue St. Joseph 18 k et Louis-Etienne-Auguste Aubert, rentier, âgé de cinquante-six ans, demeurant à Paris rue de Cléry 106, aïeul maternel de l'enfant.

'Et ont le père et les témoins signé après lecture. Signé, Zola, Lecerf, Aubert et Decau, maire.'

Here, then, on April 2, 1840, was born a male child, issue of a love marriage between a man of forty-three and a woman of nineteen, in whose veins flowed the triple *mélange* of Greek, Italian, and French blood, and of that French blood which is most French, his mother's race being natives of what, in the days of French provinces, was known as the Island, or the Core, of France. The father, as has been seen, was a man of puissant energy and indefatigable industry, but to some extent a Bohemian in temperament, as was proved by his early wanderings, his repeated changes of profession, and a certain intermittency of tenacity. The mother was a simple, good-hearted woman, in whom the soul and body devotion of the Frenchwoman to her husband and her home were the main characteristics. These are things which, in view of the fact that Zola himself has set the example of the study of hereditary influences, it is well to note.

In writing about Emile Zola's father, one thinks almost involuntarily of the father of a great English novelist who also was not fortunate in his enterprises, and whose son was left an orphan without resources. But I do not think that the comparison will bear investigation. François Zola was an unlucky man, and unlucky without any fault of his. He worked hard, and, if he failed, it was because fate was against him, in so far as fate may be intended to imply a conca-

tenation of untoward circumstances. The birth of his son seems to have spurred the engineer on to renewed industry and effort. Just at that time the fortifications of Paris were in process of construction, and M. Thiers, the Prime Minister, was personally and especially interested in this work, which has since been condemned as worse than useless. François Zola set about to win the favour of the then powerful minister, invented a machine for the removal and transportation of earth, and submitted it to M. Thiers. It was experimented with and accepted, and this success won over the support and patronage of the Prime Minister. Three more years were spent in Paris in the winning of influences, and, in 1843, Emile Zola being then three years old, François Zola, now assured of protection, removed himself and his family back to Aix, there to settle down and to carry out his great scheme. The first home was in the Cours Ste. Anne, whence the family removed to a house in the impasse Sylvacane, which had been formerly inhabited by members of the Thiers family. Two years and a half passed without any progress being made in the business which had induced François Zola to settle in Aix, and at the end of this period he was obliged to return to Paris to solicit a royal decree compelling various refractory landlords to sell the land through which the canal was to pass. Knowing that the fight would be a hard one, he removed his

family back to Paris, and it was not until the end of 1846 that, thanks to the protection of M. Thiers, he was able to return again to Aix, this time equipped with full powers. One cannot but wonder to what extent these early wanderings, this involuntary Bohemianism, must have affected and influenced the child Emile.

Ten years had been spent in effort by François Zola, and the end was at last attained. The engineer's happiness knew no bounds. He foresaw fame and fortune—fame for himself and fortune for his dear ones. So anxious was he to identify his little son with his great enterprise, that on the day when the first spadeful of earth was turned Emile was with him, hand in hand, to watch the first act towards the consummation of a hardly-won triumph.

The ill-fortune which had pursued François Zola all his life was not, however, to abandon him. One early morning, whilst superintending his workmen on the canal, the treacherous mistral smote him with her icy hands; a pleurisy ensued, and, three months after the triumphant inauguration of the canal-works, he died, away from home in a hotel-room in Marseilles. Emile Zola has described this mournful event in his 'Page d'Amour,' where Madame Grandjean relates the death of her husband, far from home, in a town of strangers.

François Zola lies buried in the Aix cemetery.

Over his grave is a stone, with the simple inscription of his name and the dates of his birth and of his death. His great work was afterwards carried through, though without benefit to his family, and it is to the 'Canal Zola,' as it is known by the people, that Aix owes the first necessary of life. A boulevard in the town was christened after the unfortunate engineer, and this is perhaps all the reward that came to him, long after his death, for his ten years of unremitting labour.

The young widow, with her orphan child, then seven years old, were thus left practically destitute, and with that worst of inheritances—a claim against the authorities, which could only be enforced, if it was to be enforced at all, by unending lawsuits. Fortunately Madame Zola's parents, the Auberts, were living with her. These had some small property, and, better than this, Madame Aubert, the grandmother of the little boy, was in point of courage and domestic ability a typical Frenchwoman. A native of that Beauce which Emile Zola was afterwards to describe with such *maestria* in his book, 'La Terre,' she was endowed with all the hard-headed business capacity of the French rustic, lively withal, and, in spite of her seventy years of age, vivacity and gaiety personified. It is said that at this advanced age there was not a grey hair to be seen on her head. It was she who, after her entire

fortune, as well as the savings of Madame Zola, had been swallowed up in the various lawsuits which her daughter-in-law engaged in to establish her claims against the authorities, took the management of the little household into her hands; who, as Paul Alexis relates, 'tucked up her sleeves and set to work about the house,' and who, by clever bargains with the furniture merchants and second-hand dealers—a reminiscence of which we may, perhaps, trace in Martine's skirmishes in 'Le Docteur Pascal'—kept the wolf from the door of the house in the impasse Sylvacane.

CHAPTER II

SCHOOLDAYS IN AIX

Little Emile was the spoilt child of his mother and his grandparents. From the very first they seem to have been convinced that the youngster would some day restore the fallen fortune of his family; but what chiefly guided them in their treatment was their pity for the lad left fatherless at so early an age. Their treatment of him resolved itself into letting him do just what he liked. There was an immense garden in front of the house, and it was in this garden—which may afterwards have suggested 'le Paradou'—that the urchin spent most of his time. His earliest recollections are of mad gallops down the overgrown pathways of this verdant wilderness, of games of hide-and-seek with the merry old grandmother, and of childish musings in shady and solitary corners. He was a very inquisitive child, plying incessant questions, anxious to know the why and wherefore of all things, and often startling his mother and grandparents with the strangest queries. Apart

from this he was not, however, a very precocious child. It must be related that, at the age of seven, Emile Zola, who was afterwards to take so preponderant a place in the world of letters, did not know his alphabet. It was grandpapa Aubert who one day put his foot down and said that that sort of thing would not do, and, the women agreeing, a family council as to the best steps to be taken towards the lad's education was held. The grandfather suggested that he should be sent to the local *lycée*, or public school, but Madame Aubert would not hear of this, for Emile, she said, was too young to rough it amongst other boys, and it was she who found a place in the town of Aix where he could be instructed in the rudiments without being exposed to the harsh treatment that is the lot of the young *lycéen*, as it is that of every small boy in every public school the world over. The school to which Emile was sent was a *pension*, known as the 'Pension Notre-Dame,' kept by a M. Isoard, who appears to have been the least terrible of schoolmasters. Whether it was that his heart opened at once to the sharp-faced, soft-eyed little orphan, or that Madame Aubert had stipulated at the outset that the little boy was to be allowed to do what he liked, it is certain that, during the five years that Emile remained at the Pension Notre-Dame, which he frequented as a day-boy, he was treated with the

greatest kindness. Here also the system 'We mustn't upset him' was put into practice. As a very natural consequence, he did not make great progress in his studies. He was a very long time in learning his alphabet, and it was only when M. Isoard took him specially in hand, keeping him in after school hours to give him private instruction, that he at last mastered the rudiments. One of the first books that Zola learned to read was a book of the fables of La Fontaine, an author for whom he has since professed the highest admiration. Isoard coaxed the lad into learning. Emile, however, for a long time showed but little inclination for study. What he vastly preferred was to run about in the big garden at home; or, afterwards, when the family removed to a cheaper house at Pont-au-Béraud, in the country, outside the town, to wander about the fields. If ever there was a little truant in the world, it was Emile Zola, than whom in after life there has never been a man less truant to what he considered his duty and his task. Near the house at Pont-au-Béraud was a winding stream, called 'La Torse,' which was his favourite playmate. Wandering for hours together along its banks, it was here, no doubt, that he acquired that intense love for the country that has clung to him ever since, and which has leavened with poetry the prosaic realism of his work, so that the author of 'L'Assommoir' is also the writer of the 'Contes à

Ninon.' It is in the latter work, by the way, that he speaks of 'La Torse' as 'torrent in December, so discreet a brook in the fine days.'

At the age of eight Zola was described by one who knew him at the time as 'a gifted child, open, and, being accustomed to have his way, frank, gentle, and full of initiative.' Still, there was nothing to show the sort of man that he was destined to become, and if he did like his truant excursions about the country, he very probably preferred the games of marbles or of horses and driver which he used to play with remarkable zest with his two earliest and oldest friends, Solari, who afterwards became a sculptor, and Marius Roux, who took to letters also, and was a writer in later years on the 'Petit Journal.'

It was in 1852—that is to say, when he was twelve years old—that the boy's education began in earnest. In this year he was sent to the *lycée* at Aix as a boarder. It was at the cost of great sacrifices that his family were able to do this for him, for at that time ruin was close upon them. So that they might be near the lad and could visit him on the days allowed by the regulations, they once more moved into town, taking a small house in the rue Beauregard.

Emile was placed, on his entrance into the school, at the bottom of the eighth class—that is to

say, that he commenced his studies at Aix *lycée* as the lowest boy in the school. But he was a good-hearted as well as an intelligent lad, and he understood how affairs stood at home and saw that it was his duty to work hard so as to requite his family for their sacrifices on his behalf, and to be able, as soon as possible, to assist them in their daily increasing embarrassments. So, setting to work with a will, he made such progress that at the end of the year Madame Zola and the grandparents had the satisfaction of seeing Emile carry off five prizes, and, better still, to be now so far advanced that he was allowed to skip the seventh form and commence a new year in the sixth.

The want of liberty as a boarder weighing upon him, his family arranged for him to sleep at home, so that in the evenings at least he was free, after his work was done, to wander about the country as his taste prompted him to do. Perhaps this was one reason why his second year at the school was not as successful as the first, though Zola says that the reason was that the form-master bore him a grudge and made his life a burden to him. However this may be, he got no prizes at the end of the year. Moved up to the fifth form, and afterwards to the fourth, and placed under another form-master, he again distinguished himself, carrying off numerous prizes. Afterwards attending the school, where he

was now in the third class, as a day-boy, he carried off all the first prizes, and at a time when, after studying there for four years and a half, he was obliged to leave the *lycée* whilst half-way through the second class, he was considered one of the cleverest boys in the school. It may be noted that, being allowed on entering the third form the option between classical and modern, that is to say scientific studies, he chose the latter. Latin and Greek simply disgusted him, and what he specially abhorred was Latin composition and verse, which he considered useless and a bore. Natural science, on the contrary, attracted him from the first, and his essays on subjects in this branch used to be considered remarkable pieces of work by his professors. Will his critics say that this early dislike of the studies which are pre-eminently supposed to convey culture explains much in his after work? However that may be, it should be noted that his conception of the Rougon-Macquart series of novels was that it should be a contribution to a certain branch of science, and that this is in accordance with the author's tastes as a boy.

In Zola also the child was father of the man. Already as a schoolboy he distinguished himself by the precise method of his labour and his entire conscientiousness. A daily task having to be performed, he performed it, whether he liked to do so or not.

Never has the word 'Duty' been better understood by any man than by Emile Zola, even when he was a mere lad. He was not an ardent worker, but a steady one. He did what he had to do regularly, but no more. When, as a day-boy, he got back to his home, however tempting the country without might be, he would first of all sit down to his task, nor leave it until it was finished. The advantages of the little by little, of the line upon line, method of work have never been more brilliantly exemplified than in Zola, man and boy.

It was whilst a schoolboy at Aix that Zola first showed his tastes for literary composition. His first work was written whilst he was in the eighth form. Like most very juvenile work, it was an exceedingly ambitious attempt, being nothing less than a long novel of the Middle Ages, a story of the Crusades, doubtless inspired to the young author by his readings of Michaud. This manuscript still exists, for it is one of Zola's habits to preserve every scrap of writing addressed to or written by himself, and, like his present manuscript, is almost entirely without a correction. There is only one drawback about it, and that is that it is entirely illegible. Zola himself cannot decipher a single word of his boyish hieroglyphics, and it is his joke—a joke against himself—at times to produce this novel and to submit it to the examination of visitors. Besides

this novel, the lad wrote a quantity of poetry, doubtless at the time when he was in the fourth class and had begun to read the poets. Still later he wrote a comedy of three acts in verse, on a school subject, as is indicated by its title, 'Enfoncé le Pion,' which may be roughly Englished into, 'Selling the Usher.'

As a schoolboy, Zola seems to have been a timid, reserved lad, timidity and reserve being still, it may be observed, his leading characteristics. He was rather shortsighted and used to stammer, two defects which naturally increased his reluctance to associate with his noisy and teasing school-mates. These seem to have felt some animosity towards the lad, who, having learned to speak in Paris, had a way of talking which differed from theirs, and whom, in consequence, they nicknamed 'Le Franciot.' Fortunately for his happiness, at a very early period in his school career he made friends with two lads—Cézanne and Baille, with whom he soon became inseparable. In fact, Zola, Cézanne, and Baille used to be called 'the three inseparables' in Aix. This friendship appears to have originated in a companionship in arms. At that time the schoolboys were in warfare with the 'cads,' which is, I believe, the generic name given by schoolboys to the boys of the town. In the Provence towns these guerillas are the rule, not the exception, the arm invariably

used being the stone deftly hurled. Daudet relates that when a boy at Nîmes he and his comrades were constantly fighting battles with stones, but in his case it was Huguenots or Protestants against Catholics, whilst the war in Aix was of the nature of town against gown. In the 'Faute de l'Abbé Mouret' there is a passage describing such a battle with stones, which is an evident souvenir of Zola's boyish adventures in the faubourgs of Aix.

In the 'Nouveaux Contes à Ninon' will be found souvenirs of other boyish pleasures, the watching of the troops marching by, with flags flying and the band ahead. And then the processions, not then forbidden by a church-baiting Republican Government; what brave shows were these, and how the youth, in his artistic temperament, must have enjoyed the sight; the girls in white, strewing flowers, the red-robed choir-boys, the swinging censers, the high-borne crucifix, the priests in brave array, the gorgeous daïs, and closing in the procession the military band!

One cannot but wonder whether it may not be to these early impressions that may be attributed Zola's latest departure, and whether the souvenirs of these clerical pomps may not have been the impulse towards the book that is even now in preparation, 'Lourdes,' which is to be followed by another novel, which will go still deeper into the Catholic question,

and is to be called 'Rome.' Zola himself used, as a boy, to take part in these processions, and as a musician withal. Zola, though a great admirer of music, never had an ear for it, and it is to be feared that his performances on the clarionet-horn in the procession band cannot, to any extent, have added to the credit of its performance.

It has been said that in his habits of industry and of method, Zola at an early age showed what would be the characteristics of the man. In another respect also was the child the father of the man. Zola is a poet deeply tinged with romanticism—a romanticism which is constantly striving to break out in his work, and for which safety-valves, such as 'Une Page d'Amour,' 'La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret,' 'Le Rêve,' have had to be found in the course of the writing of the most prosaic, if most faithful, descriptions of the ugly, material world. Now, there never was a more romantic lad than Emile Zola, once his daily task was done, and he was free to give vent to his instincts. The greatest pleasure of the three inseparables was excursions over all the surrounding country, but excursions, moreover, where, besides exercise and fresh air, other delights were ensued. For when a likely spot had been reached after miles of walking, on some hillside or in some shady glen by the river Arc, and after the delightful open-air meal had been consumed, invariably a book would be produced, a

book of verse withal, and hours would be spent in reading aloud. Hugo was at first the favourite, as he would naturally be to boys romantically inclined; but the time came when he was dethroned by Alfred de Musset, who seemed more material and more of the living world, and to whose influence, no doubt, Zola owed his first impulses to analyse the workings of that great pulse which is the life of man.

Sometimes, and here romanticism again betrays itself, the excursions would be prolonged overnight. A mysterious cave would be sought out, beds of leaves would be made, and with who knows what reminiscences of Hugoesque brigands teeming in their heads, the lads would go to sleep. On one occasion Zola would have it that their couch should be made entirely of thyme and lavender, but that time the excursion came to an abrupt ending, a thunderstorm coming on that made the cave untenable, so that they left it at two in the morning and made their way back to town, though not until they had made the most picturesque of bonfires with the scented materials of their beds.

These are amongst Zola's most pleasant souvenirs. His schooldays, on the whole, seem to have been happy ones, in spite of the sad state of things at home. Whenever he has written about *lycée* life, it has been kindly, though there is one passage in his works where the abominable food which used to be

served to the boarders in a certain communal school is very sharply criticised. He describes a revolt and a barring-out, because the provisor would insist on having served up to the boys an abominable dish of cod with a more abominable sauce. This dish of *morue à la sauce blanche*, and the unhappy year under the unsympathetic form-master, seem to have been Zola's worst reminiscences of his school-life in Aix Grammar School.

But what undoubtedly cast a gloom over his youthful days, a gloom, the shadow of which has lengthened out over all his life, and may perhaps account for the deep tinge of melancholy, not only on his work but on his character also, was the unceasing trouble at home.

It has been related in what position the Zola family were left at the death of François Zola. The hopeless struggle of his widow to enforce her claim lasted all the time that Zola was at school in Aix. Year after year the unequal fight between the poor woman and a rich corporation was waged, each year making her chances of success more remote. The day came at last, when, in spite of Madame Aubert's sacrifices, in spite of the strictest economy at home, there was no more money to go on with. The solicitors refused to continue without guarantee for costs, and in 1857, misery—real hard misery—was staring the Zolas in the face. Just at this time, too, the valiant

old grandmother, whose courage and merriness had done so much towards keeping up the spirits of the family, died.

Emile at that time was halfway through the second form, when suddenly his studies were interrupted. His mother, after the death of Madame Aubert, matters being then desperate, had gone up to Paris to solicit the protection of her late husband's former patrons. Her absence prolonged itself ominously, until one day in February 1858 a letter arrived in which she bade her son sell the furniture in the little cottage for whatever it would fetch, and to come to Paris at once with his grandfather, old M. Aubert, 'it being impossible to live any longer in Aix.'

Emile Zola winced at this news. It was terrible to leave Aix and the dear Provence which he so loved. It was hard to leave Baille and Cézanne, his two inseparable friends. But what pained him most was that his studies had to be interrupted, if not altogether cut short.

With a sorrowful heart he informed his master of his mother's orders, and then set about obeying them. The parting between Baille and Cézanne and himself was a sad one. Still they all hoped to meet again in Paris, and this hope was afterwards realised, and the romantic boy-friendship, which had been cemented in Aix, was continued in later years under

more prosaic circumstances in Paris. Cézanne distinguished himself in the metropolis as an impressionist painter. Baille became a professor at the Polytechnic School, and had official functions as *adjoint* to the mayor of the 11th Arrondissement.

CHAPTER III

DAYS OF MISERY IN PARIS

Having sold the few sticks of furniture in the cottage at Aix, Emile Zola had just about enough money to pay for a third-class ticket to Paris for himself and for another for his old grandfather, and it was almost without a penny in his pocket that, after a long and fatiguing journey, the old man and the youth alighted in the metropolis. Emile Zola was at that time close upon eighteen years of age, a timid, retiring youth, full of romanticism and poetry, a votary of the country and the open air, but endowed by instinct and by the force of habit with perseverance, energy, and an indomitable determination to make his way and to retrieve the fortunes of his family. Few men have entered Paris under such forlorn circumstances as he did, and fewer still, having thus entered it, have so brilliantly succeeded.

It makes one think of the arrival of Chatterton in London; but there was this difference—that

Chatterton had a five-pound note in his pocket, and certain business and other relations in the capital. Zola, in the way of relations, had none but an aged and infirm grandfather and a mother, who, as subsequent events proved, was to be almost entirely dependent on his efforts for her livelihood. Zola, however, had something that Chatterton had not, and that was a tenacity of steel, an immense store of patience, and the firm conviction that all comes to him who knows how to wait, and who is prepared to suffer whilst waiting.

Of literary baggage he had none, beyond the childish novel and play, and the early verses. It is possible that at that time he may have founded some hopes on the latter.

A piece of good news awaited him at his new home, which was a dingy hotel in that dingiest of the Latin Quarter streets—the rue Monsieur-le-Prince, at number 63—which to-day is the least reputable of abodes, and which is but a few doors removed, on the same side of the street, from the house where Oliver Wendell Holmes spent two years whilst studying medicine in Paris. This piece of good news was that his mother had seen certain of his late father's friends, and that, thanks to their protection, he would be able—the dearest wish of his heart—to continue the studies which his sudden departure from Aix had interrupted.

Shortly after his arrival in Paris he was admitted as a day-boy to the Lycée St. Louis, on the boulevard St. Michel, about two minutes' walk from his home. He was placed in the second class on the modern side of the school, and in the following year—that is to say, in 1859—was moved up to the first form, which corresponds with the English sixth, where he finished his studies with that course which is known in French *lycées* as *la rhétorique*, and which is indispensable for the *baccalauréat*, or Bachelor of Arts examination, which every *lycéen* desires to pass on leaving school.

He appears to have made no new friends at the Lycée St. Louis. The Parisian schoolboys found him provincial, and chaffed him about his accent. He was known as '*Le Marseillais*,' and must bitterly have regretted his dear inseparables in the little Provençal town. The change of life and the depressing circumstances under which he was living, cooped up in a small hotel with starvation staring him and his in the face, seems for a while to have sapped his energies. He made no progress at all, and was considered by his professors and by his schoolmates as something akin to a dunce. Still, in French composition he held his own, and more than that; for, whilst in all other subjects he was invariably at the bottom of his class, in this he was almost always at the top. On one occasion an essay of his on the

subject of 'Milton, blind, dictating to his elder daughter, whilst his second daughter plays the harp,' was considered such a good piece of work by his professor, M. Levasseur, that he read it out to the form, complimenting its author in the warmest terms, and predicting for him future greatness. This M. Levasseur is living to-day, and is now a member of the French Institute. It must be some satisfaction to him to see how fully his prediction has been realised.

Whilst not working with any success at his school tasks, other than composition, Zola read with avidity. His favourite authors at that time were Musset, Montaigne, and Rabelais. Rabelais, doubtless, influenced him immensely, and more than once, when certain passages of his novels in after life were cast up against him in reproach, he has quoted in his defence the Gallic wit of the great Canon of Meudon. As to Montaigne, there is probably no author that has more influenced his successors in letters than he. To mention one only, Alphonse Daudet; it may be related that for years Montaigne was Daudet's *livre de cheret*, and that he was so devoted to it that he used, when bathing in the sea, to take his copy into the water with him, so that it was stained with the salt water, as can be seen to this day. Hugo, also, was returned to by Zola, in a *renouveau* of roman-

ticism, inspired, no doubt, by the utterly unromantic circumstances with which he was surrounded.

As for composition, there were interminable letters to the two friends at Aix; long, because postage, costing money, and money being scarce, they could not be frequent. It may be hoped that these letters have been preserved by their recipients for eventual publication, full as they were of verse, of literary projects, and of comments on the unhappy youth's surroundings.

The summer holidays of his first year at the Lycée St. Louis were spent in Aix, his mother imposing some fresh sacrifice upon herself to allow her son this ardently desired change. A second prize in French composition was all that he had to show for his work at the parish school, but doubtless both Baille and Cézanne would fully understand how it was that the successful scholar at Aix had failed in Paris.

The two months' vacation spent at Aix in 1858 were the pleasantest months that Zola ever remembered. How delightful it was after the stuffy Paris streets to wander about the beautiful Provence country, to explore over again the hillsides and the glades of the river Arc, to bathe in the stream, and, above all, far from the Parisian schoolboys who had laughed at the timid '*Marseillais*,' to be in company with Baille and Cézanne, who so fully appreciated

him, and to talk of art and literary ambition with those who understood him!

On his return to Paris, Emile Zola fell dangerously ill of fever, and remained absent from school two months after the classes had re-opened. This was a bad beginning to a year which ended still more disastrously, to some extent on that account. In the '*rhétorique*' class he was under the care of a M. Etienne, who, like M. Levasseur, noticed the excellence of Zola's French compositions, and used to read them out to the class as models of style, whilst warning his pupils against imitating their too great romanticism.

The French *lycéen* having finished his '*rhétorique*,' spends another year in the study of philosophy, and after that presents himself for his *baccalauréat* examination, which in France, contrary to what is the case in England, precedes his admission into the University. The degree of Bachelor of Arts is, it may be remarked, an indispensable certificate in France for admission to any class of higher study, as to every examination for any of the professions. The man who has not taken his '*bachot*' is considered not sufficiently educated, and every door is practically closed against him.

Zola was so sick of his life at St. Louis that he determined to skip his philosophy class and to try for his bachelorship at once. In this determination he was also prompted by his poverty and his desire to

be no longer a burthen on his mother's too slender resources. In his written examination he distinguished himself to the extent that he was second on the list, his papers on physics and chemistry, as well as in pure mathematics, being described as specially good. His success seemed assured; and after running post-haste to tell his mother of his triumph, he returned to the examination-hall to go through the *vivâ-voce* examination in living languages and literature.

Alas! the truth must be told. Emile Zola was ploughed. He 'fell through,' as the Germans say. He was rejected on the ground of nullity in literature.

The first question that was put to him was as to the date of the death of Charlemagne. He mentioned a year in the reign of Francis I. This was bad, but the next test made matters worse. He was asked to explain one of La Fontaine's fables—one of those, it appears, which kind old M. Isouard had taught him to read years ago in the study of the Pension Notre-Dame. Zola readily complied; but here his romanticism was his stumbling-block, for his explanation was such as made the professor frown ominously; and, having thereupon utterly failed in reading a German passage, he was dismissed with a 'That is enough, sir,' that foretokened the worst. And the worst it was. A zero was written against his name as his quantum of marks in *vivâ*

roce; a figure which inevitably entailed his failure. The science professors in vain interceded with their colleague, whose name has not survived. Zola was plucked.

Some months later he tried again for the indispensable degree, but this time at the University of Marseilles. Here his failure was even more lamentable. Be it that during the holidays which preceded his examination, and which he had again spent in wandering about the country round Aix with his two inseparables, he had forgotten part of what he had learned, or that fate had decreed that he should be forced into the only liberal profession which remains open to the non-diplomaed, the result was that this time he did not even pass the written examination, and had to return defeated to Paris to face the world, with two mouths to feed besides his own, without a farthing in his pocket, and without that little piece of parchment which in France is the indispensable *laissez-passer* to all the arenas where bread can be fought for and won. At this time Zola was twenty years less a few months.

His mother had again removed to a cheaper lodging, and it was in an attic at No. 241 rue Saint-Jacques that he was placed at last face to face with the world. After knocking at many doors, one of his father's friends, a M. Labot, procured him a place as clerk in a business house in the rue de la

Douane at a salary of two pounds eight shillings a month. Previous to obtaining this miserable appointment, Zola had tried to apprentice himself to a printer, so as to serve, in no matter how humble a capacity, that literature which he so loved. The work at the Docks—such was the name of the house in the rue de la Douane, a fact which may have given rise to the American story that Zola passed his youth as a 'dock labourer'—was so utterly distasteful to the young man, the salary was so hopelessly inadequate, and the chances of betterment were so entirely *nil*, that after two months of drudgery he threw up his clerkship in disgust, preferring the risk of quick starvation in the streets to the slow starvation of body, and, above all, of mind, that was the only prospect held out to him by his employment.

This was towards the middle of the year 1860, and then began for him a period of Bohemianism of the most squalid kind. Debts, borrowings, the pawnshop, the men of the law; home after home broken up and abandoned—Zola knew them all. A pennyworth of bread was his usual ordinary; he considered himself quite rich when he could add to it a pennyworth of pork. Poor Gervaise's *menus* in the last chapters of 'L'Assommoir' were his at that time, and to these early sufferings of his may be attributed in part the infinite pity with which he has always written of the hungry, the ragged, and the roofless.

Who has forgotten those words of his in 'L'Assommoir,' where, after describing how Gervaise lets her tears fall into the dish that Goujet has set before her, he exclaims, 'Ah, Seigneur, que cela est bon et triste de manger, quand on crève?'

Though there were many days in this period of Zola's life when he literally starved, when humiliations—so hard to bear when one is young and has the pride and vanity of youth—were of almost daily occurrence, he has often said that he was never happier than then.

We have all felt this on looking back on evil days; we have all acknowledged the truth of the 'Forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit.'

But in Zola's case, also—and may there not be here traced a hereditary tinge of Bohemianism?—this happiness was due to the fact that, if starving and shoeless, he was free, and that freedom meant to him the power to work as he wanted to work—that is to say, with his pen—putting into execution the hundred plans that he had carried in his head so long.

When he could afford three-halfpence for a candle he was the happiest man in Paris, for the possession of a candle meant that he could write all night, and, as young men of letters will have it, the night was to him at that time the most propitious time for literary composition.

Zola does not smoke. At Médan or in the hotel of the rue de Bruxelles he has excellent cigars, but they are for his friends. He gave up smoking when a youth, at the time now being written about, because he could not afford it, or, rather, because he preferred to light his candle to lighting his pipe. The habit once lost was not resumed, even when he could afford the costliest Havanas ever imported.

He was living at this time on the seventh floor of No. 35 rue St. Victor, in a sort of shed built out on the leads, and Cézanne was with him, having come up from Aix to revolutionise Paris with his conceptions of the pictorial art.

Working at nights, when he could afford the light, Zola spent most of his days in wandering about the quays, turning over the books on the stalls of the second-hand booksellers, who have turned the parapets of the Seine into a literary Rialto.

He often relates how at that time his overcoat, which once had been black, had assumed such a peculiar shade of green that he was ashamed to go out in it. One day he took it off, though in midwinter, to give it to a starving girl to sell for what it would fetch, and, having no coat beneath, returned to his attic in his shirt-sleeves. The newspapers he never read because he had no money

wherewith to purchase them, and he could not afford to enter a *café* or *brasserie*, even had his taste for retirement not rendered such frequentations disagreeable to him.

He was writing poetry at this time, and with all his heart and soul. To the literary baggage which he had brought with him from Aix he had now added a tale, entitled 'La Fée Amoureuse,' which was composed whilst he was studying at St. Louis, and a poem, called 'Rodolpho,' which he wrote between his two examinations and failures for the *baccalauréat* degree.

'Rodolpho' has since been printed. It forms part of a work schemed out under the title of 'L'Amoureuse Comédie,' which was to depict the three stages of love. 'Rodolpho' was the first, and represents the Inferno of love; a second poem, entitled 'L'Aérienne,' describes the Purgatory of love; whilst the third, called 'Paolo,' is the description of the triumph, or the Paradise of love.

The 'Amoureuse Comédie' was written between 1860 and 1861, and formed a small volume; but Zola could find no publisher for it, if, indeed, he ever had the courage to seek for one. It only saw the light, after a long repose in the obscurity of his table drawer, in 1881, when it was printed in part at the end of Paul Alexis's 'Notes d'un Ami.' It is difficult to pass any judgment on this early work.

I believe that Zola himself has recognised that his *forte* was elsewhere.

From the rue St. Victor he removed, under stress of circumstances, to the rue Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, his mother now going to live in a family boarding-house. His attic in the rue Saint-Etienne-du-Mont, a kind of belvedere, had formerly, it was said, been tenanted by Bernardin de St. Pierre, the author of 'Paul et Virginie'—an attic so bitterly cold that the poor author used to spend most of his time in bed writing with icy fingers. It was here and under these circumstances that he composed the second part of his 'Amoureuse Comédie,' 'L'Aérienne.' In prose, so far, he had done but little; indeed, beyond some stray articles in the country papers, nothing but two tales—one the 'Fée Amoureuse,' referred to above, and the other his 'Carnet de Danse,' which will be found in his 'Contes à Ninon.'

Meanwhile, his misery was getting deeper and deeper. Time was when the only prospect was the street. Even the icy attic in the rue St. Etienne-du-Mont had to be abandoned, his few sticks of furniture being seized upon for rent, so that he drifted to that last refuge from homelessness—the *hôtel borgne*, or lowest class of hotel. This hotel, now no longer existent, was in the rue Soufflot and was tenanted by the most raffish of students and the lowest of female

outcasts. Raids by the police were of almost nightly occurrence, and a very inferno it must have been to this sensitive and retiring youth to live amidst scenes of the lowest debauchery. One will remember his description of a police raid on just such an hotel in one of the chapters of 'Nana.'

But while living thus, in the most miserable circumstances, cooped up in a squalid room, with the riot of drunkenness in his ears and the stench of vice in his nostrils, with starvation and the street as the only refuge hanging over his head, the young man continued to work with dogged energy and with a high ambition. A great poetical scheme was at that time in his head—a poetical trilogy, which was to be entitled 'La Génèse,' and which, in three poems, was to relate, with scientific accuracy, first, the creation or birth of the world; secondly, the history of man from the beginning to the present day; and, thirdly, the future of man, showing the successive stages by which he should eventually reach to heaven.

Of this ambitious work but eight lines were ever written, the work upon it having been confined to drawing out the scheme and preparing the details. It may interest those who have never had a taste of Zola's poetic quality to read these eight lines, and here they are:—

LA NAISSANCE DU MONDE

I

Principe créateur, seule Force première,
Qui d'un souffle vivant souleva la matière,
Toi qui vis, ignorant la naissance et la mort,
Du prophète inspiré donne-moi l'aile d'or.
Je chanterai ton œuvre et, sur elle tracée,
Dans l'espace et les temps je lirai ta pensée;
Je monterai vers toi, par ton souffle emporté,
T'offrir ce chant mortel de l'immortalité—

—and that was all.

Let one pause a moment to think of this young man in his miserable attic, rented at twelve shillings a month, in the most squalid of the refuges of poverty and vice, with scarcely a crust to put between his lips and clothes hardly decent enough to allow him to go out, sitting down to such a task as this. How blind is youth, and what a happy blindness it is!

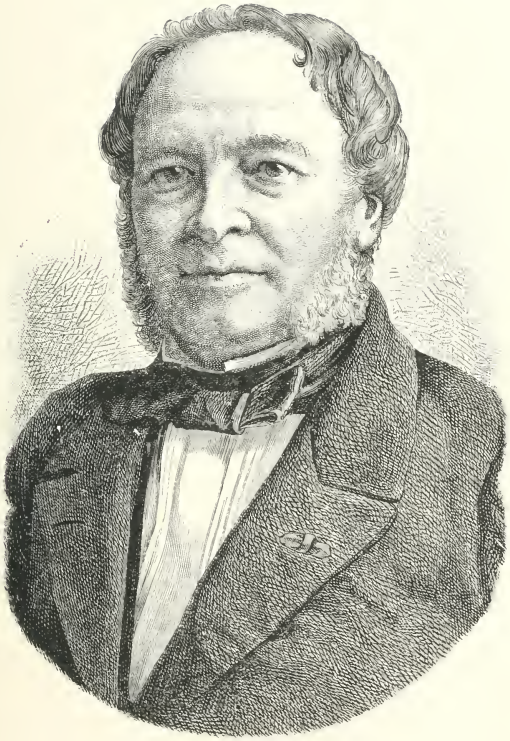
CHAPTER IV

THE STRUGGLE UPWARDS

The end of the year 1861 found Emile Zola in the state that has been described. It was evident to the young poet that, however much liberty might delight him, it was impossible for him to continue the sort of life that he was leading for a much longer period.

A M. Boudet, member of the French Academy of Medicine, gave him a helping hand just at a time when things were at the worst, writing him a letter of introduction to M. Louis Hachette, the publisher, head of what was then, as it is now, one of the most important publishing houses in Paris.

M. Hachette had no immediate employment to offer him, though he was able to engage him a month later. Zola must have spent a very miserable Christmas, and would have spent a still more miserable New Year's Day had not his friend, M. Boudet, invented a little job for him, which enabled him, without hurting the susceptibilities of the sensitive



M. Louis Hachette.

young Provençal, to hand him a small piece of money. This job was to carry round to the houses of M. Boudet's friends the cards which it is usual in France to leave on acquaintances on New Year's Day. One can imagine poor Emile Zola, with his head full of poetic visions and his shabbiest of coats on his back, trudging about in the slush and the snow to execute this most menial of services.

It may here be remarked, to Zola's credit, that the long and bitter sufferings of his youth did not sour his character, as they might very naturally have done. When he talks of those evil days it is without indignation or revolt.

'I had no money,' he will say, when speaking of those bad times, 'and I did not know what was going to become of me; but, no matter, those were the good times. Ah, youth! one's first literary passions—the happy careless days! When I had read my fill along the bookstalls on the quays, or when I returned from some long walk on the banks of the Bièvre, or in the Plain of Ivry, I used to climb up to my room and eat my penny-halfpenny-worth of potatoes and then set to work. I used to write poems, I wrote my first tales, and I was perfectly happy. . . ."

Towards the end of January, 1862, he was admitted into M. Hachette's employment as clerk at a salary of a pound a week. For some

weeks he was exclusively employed in packing up the books, and made many hundred parcels with brown paper and string. At the end of this period he was promoted into the advertising department with a slightly better salary.

'I felt myself saved then,' he says; 'I had one foot down, and I could say good-bye for ever to Bohemia.'

Still, at first he was not happy. Bohemia, however squalid, will always inspire a feeling of nostalgia, and there were times when, over his unsympathetic tasks, he found himself regretting the freedom of his garret, where at least he could work at what he chose. It was also something of a Tantalus task to him to see so many interesting books passing through his hands—he who loved reading next best to writing—and to be able to read of them nothing but the titles.

Still, he saw where duty lay, and respect for duty had always been his characteristic. So, repressing his feelings, he did what he had to do with the same method and industry which he had shown at school, and gained the reputation with the firm of being a very fair *employé*.

His ambition had never departed from him, and though his days were taken up in the service of his employers, he had his evenings to himself as well as the whole of Sunday, and these precious hours were

turned to their best use by him in literary work. It would seem that, through living in a literary atmosphere so eminently practical as was that of a publishing house, his views on literary production had become more practical, for he abandoned not only the idea of his 'Génèse,' but gave up writing poetry altogether. From 1862 to 1864 he wrote a number of *contes*, or short stories, which were afterwards published under the title of 'Contes à Ninon.' He was a very slow and laborious worker at that time, and was satisfied if, after working several hours, he had finished the equivalent of a printed page as his night's work. His style at this time was elaborate and precise, and 'Contes à Ninon,' though containing little of the power that afterwards distinguished his work, are a very creditable literary effort on the part of a young man of twenty-two.

One of the first things that he did after his appointment to Hachette's was to leave the odious hotel in the rue Soufflot, moving his few belongings to a house in the impasse St. Dominique. This house was once a cloister, and Zola's room was like a monk's cell. One thinks of Balzac and his monkish robe and cowl in this connection, and one wonders, also, how far the influence of his surroundings may have prompted Zola in later years to write 'Le Rêve.'

It was here that he wrote three of his tales,

'Le Sang,' 'Simplice,' and 'Les Voleurs et l'Ane.' 'Sœur des Pauvres' was written later on, when Zola had again removed to the rue de la Pépinière. Here also he wrote 'Celle qui m'aime,' the tale in which his future power, perhaps, first betrayed itself. He afterwards again removed, this time to No. 7 rue des Feuillantines, another of those old-time houses which seem, at that time, to have been dear to his romantic nature. These constant migrations of his are to be noted. They indicate a certain tinge of Bohemianism which was not rubbed off until much later, and they remind one of the restlessness of the nomadic François Zola, his father.

His salary at Hachette's, although it saved him from absolute misery, was so inadequate that for many years Zola was not free from that wearing anxiety about money which is the worst enemy to mental endeavour. Yet in his case, as in that of Balzac, this constant struggle seems to have been beneficial—to have urged him on to constant endeavour—to have made only the stronger his determination to fight his way to success.

A great advantage connected with his position in this publishing house was that it brought him into contact with most of the important literary men of the day. He was constantly meeting Taine and About, not to mention other celebrated men of letters, in connection with his business. Yet he seems to

have made no friendship with any of these, nor, indeed, reserved as he always was, did he, during all the years that he was at Hachette's, attach himself to any new friends. It is true that both Baille and Cézanne had now come to Paris and had settled there—Baille to study at the Polytechnic school and Cézanne to paint in his studio. Twice a week—that is to say, on the days when the Polytechnician had his exeat—the three, now more inseparable than ever, used to walk out together and tell each other of the episodes of the fight to which they had so looked forward when schoolboys at Aix, and in which they were now, and Zola most of all, so keenly engaged.

Although he made no new friends, his circle of acquaintances enlarged itself. Already at that age he must have impressed his comrades with his mastership, and a number of young men used to visit him at his room in the rue des Feuillantines, where he 'received' every Thursday, to drink tea with him, to hear him talk and to listen to such passages of his writings as he could be prevailed upon to read aloud. Marius Roux, the old schoolfellow, was one of the *habitués*, and so afterwards were Valabrègue and Paul Alexis.

It is not astonishing that, as a young man, Zola made so few friends. He is at one and the same time the most sympathetic and the least sympathetic

of men. There is certainly no better heart in man's bosom than beats in his, and yet, be it from diffidence, or from melancholy, or because his sense of the debt of sympathy he has to pay to humanity in general makes him reluctant to pay it out in driblets to individuals, his manner, even to those who have known him a long time, is a distant one. Often, just when it may be thought that the ice has been broken and that the reserve has been overcome, Zola will suddenly pull himself together and by his manner make it clearly understood that it was only by temporary forgetfulness that he neglected to keep his distance. Withal, he is the most obliging of men.

It seems strange that so clever a man as Taine, than whom, perhaps, no better connoisseur of man and of human talent ever lived, should have failed to recognise in the young *employé* at Hachette's somebody who was destined to higher things than the writing and checking of advertisements in a publisher's office. And it is stranger still that, having known Zola under these circumstances, and having thus been a witness of the tremendous fight which Zola fought ere he reached the pinnacle of success on which he now stands, Taine should have been, even to his last hour, so unsympathetic towards a man whose heroic courage should certainly have commanded his respect, even if his work did not

command his approval. It was certainly to Taine's influence that Zola's repeated defeats at the elections of the French Academy were due. Taine would not hear of Zola's candidature, and opposed it in every way in his power.

The regularity of his habits, his industry and method, won the esteem of Zola's employer. Little by little his position at Hachette's improved. One day, however, M. Hachette was to learn that young Zola had higher ambitions than those of clerkship. One Monday morning M. Hachette found on his desk the manuscript of a poem, signed Emile Zola, which was none other than a copy of 'L'Amoureuse Comédie,' that love trilogy of which mention has been made. Zola had placed it where it was found the previous Saturday after the publisher's departure. M. Hachette read the poem through, and though he did not see his way to publishing it—to use the consecrated phrase—he sent for Zola, asked him to sit down, and had a long conversation with him. From that day forward he seems to have conceived considerable respect for his strange young *employé*, raised his salary to eight pounds a month, and neglected no opportunity of putting extra work in his way.

Two months later, moreover, he sent for Zola again and asked him to write a tale for a children's magazine which was published by him. Zola set to

work, and wrote his 'Sœur des Pauvres,' which can be read in the 'Contes à Ninon.' Hachette read it, and told Zola that he was a revolutionary, and that he could not print it.

Zola was not discouraged. He placed the manuscript with the others and continued to work. Every evening, after dinner—that is to say, punctually at half-past eight o'clock—with unswerving regularity he used to sit down to his table and do his daily task, so many pages of manuscript, nor retire to bed until this task was done. The same amount of work was done on Sundays, but on these days in the morning, before he allowed himself to take any holiday, and the habit of writing at night being so strong upon him, he used to close the shutters of his window and sit down to write by candle-light.

His work at Hachette's, as has been related, consisted in checking and reading the advertisements and reviews which appeared in the Paris and provincial papers in connection with the publishing house. Zola thus had occasion to study journalism in all its phases, and it must be recorded that at first his opinion on this kind of literary production was a highly contemptuous one. In later years it was to journalism that he had to look for the means by which he was able to carry on the fight for his recognition.

His first book, 'Contes à Ninon,' was published on October 24, 1864, by M. Lacroix, of the firm of Hetzel, the publishers of Jules Verne. Some of the stories of which this volume was composed had already been printed. 'La Fée Amoureuse' had appeared in an Aix paper five years previously, called 'La Provence,' and two others, 'Simplice' and 'Le Sang,' had appeared in a magazine published in Lille.

It was one evening in July that Zola heard from M. Hetzel. On his return home from his office he found a note asking him to call on the publisher on the following day. He was so excited that that night he could not work, but spent many hours roaming about the Luxemburg Garden wondering what might be in store for him and his book. He relates that he did not sleep a wink that night. Calling the following day on M. Hetzel, he heard the joyful news that his book was accepted, and that it would be published by M. Lacroix, who then and there drew up a contract for the young author to sign with trembling fingers. It may be said at once that by this contract no emolument of any kind was assigned to Zola, who, however, was only too glad to get his book published on any conditions. He signed with great pleasure, though he was not to, and never did, receive a penny for his work. When one remembers that, contrary to what so often happens in England, French publishers never, on any condition whatever,

will undertake the risk of publishing a first book at their own expense, one will be better able to understand Zola's joy at an offer which, though it conveyed no pecuniary benefit, was to give him, at no cost to himself, his first chance of being heard by the great public of Paris.

The 'Contes à Ninon,' without being a great success, seems to have attracted some attention to the young author, and to have opened certain doors to him. During the eighteen months which followed on its publication, previous to his departure from Hachette's, he contributed to various Paris and provincial publications. The 'Petit Journal' accepted three or four articles from his pen, 'La Vie Parisienne' published some of his stories, whilst the 'Salut Public' of Lyons accepted a series of papers on literary and artistic subjects, which were afterwards published in book form under the title of 'Mes Haines,' a title which in itself reveals the fighter and the innovator.

In the meanwhile he was working away at a new novel, entitled 'La Confession de Claude,'[1] which he

[1] *La Confession de Claude* was very severely criticised in a paper called *Le Nain Jaune* by Barbey d'Aurevilly, and on December 31 of that year (1865) the following reply from Zola's pen appeared in that journal :—

'Sir,—It is customary for writers who are attacked (*éreintés*) to make no answer to the insults which are addressed to them. I do not, therefore, wish to defend myself against the attacks which one of your writers has thought fit to make upon me.

'That your correspondent should style *La Confession de Claude* "une jolie prune de reine-Claude," that he should call my hero "a

had begun in 1862, and which was published in October, 1865, a year after 'Contes à Ninon,' by the same publisher, M. Lacroix. This book has not survived, though it is doubtless remembered with some affection by its author, as it was the first that brought in some returns in the form of *droits d'auteur*, or royalties. It appears to have attracted some attention, and notably that of the Public Prosecutor, who sent down to Hachette's to have some inquiries made about its author, and for a short time it seemed as though a prosecution were to be instituted. Zola's reputation was not, however, to be made in this way. He was to win fame, not notoriety.

During these eighteen months Zola worked away with the same method and regularity as before. He had realised that ambition which satisfies so many

toad," and should describe my *métier* as consisting in spinning out over 320 pages what Cambronne, more concisely, expressed in a single word, all that is a mere question of bad taste, which troubles me but little.

'But I cannot allow a publishing firm to be made responsible for a book which they did not issue. Your critic speaks of my book as "Hachette's little book." If that is a statement dictated by malice, or a joke, I declare myself unable to understand its import. If it was made by mistake, I demand a rectification.

'Yours, &c.,

'EMILE ZOLA.'

Zola answered Barbey d'Aurevilly in another way as soon as the opportunity presented itself to him. This answer will be found in the volume *Mes Haines*, under the title of *Le Catholique Hystérique*. It is one of the bitterest criticisms which has appeared since the days of the *Edinburgh Review*.

Frenchmen of letters, he had had his first book published, but he was far from satisfied with the result obtained. So, plodding away at Hachette's during the daytime, regularly every evening at half-past eight, as soon as dinner was over, he sat down to his table and his work, leaving to other less ambitious *confrères* the *flâneries* on the boulevard with the halo of the published book round their heads. He had other work cut out for him, and meant to do it.

It was in November of 1865 that the Public Prosecutor's inquiries about the author of the 'Confession de Claude' were made, a circumstance which may possibly have confirmed Zola in a resolution which for some time had been germing in his head and which was none other than to leave Hachette's and its irksome daily tasks and to give himself up entirely to literary production. He had now two books to his name and his *entrées* into various more or less important publications. His name was no longer totally unknown, his first efforts had excited some curiosity, and a path, however rugged and tortuous, was before his feet. The question was whether he could afford to throw away the certainty of daily bread assured by the monthly salary of eight pounds which Hachette was paying him. Perhaps Bohemia to some extent also exercised her fascination. However this may be, Zola determined to

take the risk,[1] and at the end of November 1865 gave notice to leave on January 31 of the following year.

He was nearly twenty-six years old when, with two books to his name and some manuscripts in his drawer, he stepped into the arena, determined to live by literature and by literature alone, or to starve in the attempt.

His decision was not without courage. The circumstances under which it was taken, especially when it is remembered what experiences he had undergone, might almost warrant one in saying that it was heroic.

[1] In an admirable interview between M. Zola and M. Xau, published by the latter in 1880, I find, since writing the above, the following explanation, from M. Zola's lips, of his differences with Hachette & Cie.—differences which led to their separation:

'However that may be,' said M. Zola after a pause, 'I was at Messrs. Hachette's when I published, in 1864, *Les Contes à Ninon*, and, in 1865, *La Confession de Claude*. These gentlemen (Hachette & Cie.) looked askance on my literary work—it may be that they considered that I was wasting over it time which belonged to them. Besides, *La Confession de Claude* seemed to them somewhat stiff.

'So, one day, one of them said to me, outright:

'"You are earning 8*l.* a month, which is ridiculous. You have lots of talent and would do better to take up literature altogether. You would find glory and profit there."

'The hint was a direct one and I understood it. This was at the end of November 1865. I accordingly gave notice to leave on January 31, 1866, for though I was determined to leave them, I did not want to fall into immediate want, and all the less so that the end of the year is in Paris always connected with extraordinary and heavy expenses.'

CHAPTER V

IN THE THICK OF THE FIGHT

Zola's opinion at that time about journalism, as a form of literary production, has already been described. It was, however, to journalism that he determined to look for his maintenance, now that his daily bread was to be earned by his pen alone. When he gave Hachette notice to leave he appears to have had nothing definite to hope for, although a certain M. Bourdin, the son-in-law of the great De Villemessant, had no doubt persuaded him that his father-in-law might be pleased to make use of his services. It was, indeed, to Villemessant that, acting on M. Bourdin's advice, Zola wrote, and the proposal that he made was the following one. M. de Villemessant, after successfully establishing the 'Figaro,' then a weekly publication, to which, by the way, Zola had previously sent in certain of his tales, where, however, they had not found acceptance, had just founded a new daily penny paper, entitled 'L'Evénement.' One of the features of this new paper was its theatrical news column, which, supplied by a

special writer, gave those items of tittle-tattle, news, personal items and anecdotes, which since have become an indispensable feature on the daily *menu* of the newspaper reader, but which at that time were considered the newest of that new journalism of which M. de Villemessant was the creator. Zola then proposed to do for books and literature what this other member of the 'Evénement' staff was doing for the drama and things theatrical. He proposed to keep his readers *au courant* with the titles of books which were to be published, with a short analysis of each, interspersing these items of news with anecdotes about their authors, and as a special feature to quote the most striking passages in the future publications, from advance-sheets which he undertook to procure from the publisher.

De Villemessant, who was always on the look-out for novelties, and who was delighted to find new men sharing his views on journalism, at once wrote to Zola asking him to call upon him. The interview seems to have been a most satisfactory one. De Villemessant was struck with the ardour of the young writer and forthwith engaged him on trial for a month. 'You have *carte blanche*,' he said; 'the "Evénement" will publish everything that you send in. At the end of the month I shall know the sort of stuff you have in you, and I will then come to definite decision.'

A very remarkable man was this De Villemessant, who after innumerable failures and a fight as hard in its way as was that of Zola in another created for himself in the 'Figaro' one of the finest newspaper properties in the world. This paper, which at the outset was so poor that time and time again the cashier had to desert his pay-desk rather than face the clamouring members of the staff, now pays away for contributions considerably over forty thousand pounds a year, and divides amongst its fortunate proprietors fully four times that amount per annum. This magnificent success was due to De Villemessant, and to him alone. The paper is to-day edited as though he were still living, and it were to come under his inspection. Before deciding on any new departure the editor, he himself has said it, will say to himself, 'Would De Villemessant approve of this?' and is guided in his decision by his reminiscences of De Villemessant's principles in matters of journalism. He was a very liberal paymaster, and made the fortune of most of those who were associated with him, but he was also a most exacting employer. It was his rule to read the 'Figaro' through each day from the first line to the last, and to mark any passages that either specially pleased him, or which he disapproved of. The paper so marked used to be pasted up in the editorial common room, and

was, as may be fancied, eagerly scanned by the members of the staff.

Such was the man under whom Zola had now enlisted. He began work on 'L'Evénement' on February 2, 1866, and by the 15th of the month had already received a letter of warm congratulations from its proprietor. At the end of the month, on applying to the cashier for his salary, which had not been fixed, he received the sum of 20*l.*, a very Pactolus to him at that time. It really seemed that in abandoning Hachette's and the salary of 8*l.* a month he had acted with the best of common sense.

This 20*l.* was the first money that Zola had ever received for the work of his pen, royalties from 'La Confession de Claude' only coming in later. One can imagine his joy. His column in the 'Evénement,' which by the way was headed 'Books of To day and To-morrow,' was attracting considerable attention in Paris. Everything looked very hopeful.

The articles on 'The Books of To-day and To-morrow' were such a success that De Villemessant asked Zola to do the art criticism as well, beginning with the Salon of 1866. The series of articles which, in consequence of this order, Zola contributed to the 'Evénement' under the title of 'Mon Salon' can be read in a collected form in the volume 'Mes Haines,' and it may be said at once that their tone

was fully in accordance with the title of the book in which they were afterwards reprinted. The first article in which Zola discussed the various artists of whom the Salon jury was composed, and very clearly denied the rights of the majority of them to occupy functions so important, created a great sensation in the artistic world. This sensation increased in intensity as each new article appeared. Who was this young man who with such undeniable vigour ran tilt against all the accepted notions of art, and laid such irreverent hands on persons whose mastership had until then been undisputed? This question was in every mouth, and on 'Mon Salon' day the 'Evénement' could be seen in everybody's hands, and the name of Emile Zola could be heard in every mouth. What created the strongest impression was the power, the conviction with which the unknown critic expressed himself. Those whom he attacked the worst could not but recognise with growing uneasiness that this iconoclast was no contemptible adversary. The fury of his victims knew no bounds. Letters of insult and menace poured in on the 'Evénement;' one of the worst-hit artists spoke of provoking his critic, and a duel was narrowly avoided. Demonstrations of hostility against the 'Evénement' could be seen any day on the boulevard. Artists used to buy the paper and, awaiting the passage of either De Villemessant or of Emile Zola, tear it into pieces before their eyes.

What specially provoked the old-established masters was, that the young writer whilst demolishing their reputations with indescribable vigour, with no less ardour set up against them a painter, who at that time was considered an innovator as daring as he was ridiculous. This was the great Manet, specimens of whose work may to-day be seen at the Luxemburg, and who chiefly owed it to Zola that his genius first got the chance of imposing itself. One of his best pictures, by the way, to be seen at the Luxemburg is a group of portraits, amongst which will be recognised that of Emile Zola at the age of thirty.

Now, though De Villemessant was very pleased with all the noise that was made about the 'Evénement' in connection with Zola's articles, he had quite enough battles of his own to fight, and desired no fresh ones not of his seeking. It would be unjust to him to suppose that any feeling of jealousy of the sensation created by the young writer prompted him, because in De Villemessant every personal feeling was subordinated to the interests of his paper. He seems to have thought that the animosity inspired against the paper by Zola's articles more than counterbalanced the benefit of the great publicity given to his paper thereby, and so it was that he suddenly begged Zola to terminate the 'Mon Salon' series in two articles at the most. Zola was forced to obey, though with reluctance. The articles

were afterwards republished in volume form by Julien Lemer, and this volume going out of print, were, as has been stated, incorporated in the collection of literary and artistic criticisms which was published under the significant title of 'My Hatreds.'

Zola's next attempt on the 'Evénement' was very much less successful. Writing art-criticism was all very well, but fiction, he believed, was his forte, and he lost no time in trying to use his connection with the 'Evénement' for the advancement of his endeavours in this branch of literary production. He proposed to Villemessant to write a serial story for the 'Evénement,' and submitted the plot of the tale. It was approved of and the order was given. Zola had no other object in view in writing this tale than to make money. He proposed to write it to please the readers of the 'Evénement,' not to expose his own very personal views on fiction. Now, whenever Zola has written to order he has failed as signally as he has succeeded where he has worked according to his own light. 'Le Vœu d'une Morte' was a failure from the very commencement. It neither pleased him nor the people for whom it was written. The readers of the 'Evénement' complained about the serial, threatening to stop their subscriptions if such stories were printed in the paper, the inevitable result being that De Villemessant stopped its publication before Zola was half way through it. Zola

seems to have admitted himself that the story was worth nothing, for 'Le Vœu d'une Morte' was never finished. Possibly at the time he may have felt some mortification, whilst to console himself for the failure he could recall the fact that Balzac's masterpieces met with just the same fate at the hands of the newspaper-reading public when they were published in serial form. Only, unfortunately, Zola felt that 'Le Vœu d'une Morte' was very far from being a masterpiece.

Before the incorporation of the 'Evénement' with the 'Figaro,' which was thereupon transformed into a daily paper, Zola contributed a series of articles entitled 'Marbres et Plâtres,' which were literary portraits of leading *littérateurs* of the day. Those of Edmond About, Taine, Jules Janin, and Flaubert are especially good and worth preserving. It is a significant fact that these articles were published anonymously, or rather over the pseudonym of 'Simplice.' This was doubtless by De Villemessant's orders, the name of Zola inspiring such rancour at the time. It must be added that by now De Villemessant had begun to regret his former opinion of Zola; he believed that for once he had been mistaken. Zola's favour with him diminished daily, and though he was allowed to contribute a few sketches to the daily 'Figaro,' his connection with De Villemessant was abruptly closed barely a year after it had commenced under such

auspicious circumstances—that is to say, in the beginning of 1867. The 'Figaro' was afterwards very hostile to the author, attacking his books with surprising vigour. Zola, however, conquered the 'Figaro' as he conquered all his other adversaries, and, thirteen years later, re-entered triumphantly through the door out of which he had crept with hanging head. The 'Figaro' is to-day, and has been for many years past, his warmest supporter. 'The "Figaro" is my paper,' he said to me the other day.

During the year that he spent as writer on the 'Evénement,' Zola made a number of new acquaintances, and perhaps, in the case of Manet, one new friend. By his vigorous defence of the new ideas in art he won to himself the sympathy of the whole school of innovators and art-revolutionaries, the impressionists of to-day, Pissaro, Monet, Degas, Renoir, and many others.

It was a happy year for Zola. Never before had he had such sums of money to dispose of. And the delicious sensation of being his own master after the long drudgeries of his clerkship! In the summer he took a long holiday at Bennecourt on the Seine, with Baillé, Cézanne, Valabrègue and other friends, and whilst boating on the river or wandering about the fields, talked of the books that he meant to write, and impressed all who heard him with the magnitude of his ambition and the firmness of his purpose.

Still incessant anxiety overhung him. Though the first skirmishes had been won, little had been gained beyond some notoriety, not, perhaps—by reason of the animosity which had engendered it—of the most desirable kind.

The fact that he had been earning money easily in journalism, and the fuss made about his work in Paris, had not turned his head, and not for a single day, except when he was taking his holiday at Bennecourt, did he interrupt his methodical, regular, daily work. How many young provincials, finding themselves, after a long period of misery, with money in their pockets, and their names on every tongue, would have resisted the temptations of the *café*, the pleasant triumphs of the walk on the boulevards at the hour of the absinthe, when passers-by would turn and say: 'That's So-and-so, whose articles in the "Evénement" are making such a stir!' One must understand Paris and its temptations to appreciate the heroism of Zola's conduct. Not one man in a thousand would have had the courage to act as he did, and it is accordingly only fair that his success has been what not one man in ten thousand, nay, in a hundred thousand, ever achieves. He did not, like hundreds of his *confrères*, eat his corn in the grass, looking for a better harvest in due season.

The only Bohemianism in which he indulged himself whilst living in the most burgherly and

steadiest of fashions, was to move from one house to another. During the year that he was collaborating on the 'Evénement,' he appears to have changed his address three times. From the rue des Feuillantines he had moved to the boulevard Montparnasse, thence to the rue Saint-Jacques, and then again to the rue de Vaugirard, where he had two rooms with a balcony which overlooked the Luxemburg Garden.

It was after the severance of his connection with the 'Evénement' that he took what is always a decisive step in the life of the Parisian writer, he moved to the other side of the water. The French *littérateur* invariably makes his *début* in the Latin Quarter, but a day comes when he feels that life must be taken in earnest, and he packs up his traps and crosses the water. When this day came to Emile Zola, he left the rue de Vaugirard and moved to Batignolles, on the Avenue Clichy, not very far from the rue de Bruxelles, where the fine house which he now inhabits is situated.

Matters were now rather serious. The 'Evénement' was closed to him, and his failure to please Villemessant was against his obtaining other engagements on the Press. At the same time he had created to himself a number of enemies by his criticisms, and if at the same time he had won some friends, these were not in a position to assist him in his profession.

Misery again peered in at the door, with a countenance all the more ugly that he had thought never to see it again. During the year 1867, by working incessantly and accepting all kinds of literary labour, much of it of the least agreeable kind, he managed to earn from ten to sixteen pounds on an average each month—stray articles, hawked round here and there, another Salon, which he wrote for a paper called 'La Situation,' which was financed by the King of Hanover, and the editor of which very soon cancelled the order he had given, terrified at the storm which burst about his head when the art-world saw the hated signature in the columns of his paper.

It was in the midst of this struggle that Zola wrote one of his best and one of his worst books simultaneously. The former was 'Thérèse Raquin,' the latter was a book called 'Les Mystères de Marseille.' This latter book has been so often cast up in Zola's face, as the skeleton in his literary cupboard, that it may be of interest to relate in his own words the circumstances under which it was written, and the author's own opinion on it.

'This novel,' writes Zola, speaking of 'Les Mystères de Marseille,' 'has a history which it may be useful to relate. It was in 1867, in the difficult days of my *débuts*. There were days when there was no bread in the house. Well, on one of

these days of blackest misery, the director of a small Marseilles paper, "Le Messager de Provence," came to make me an offer, an idea of his, by which he hoped to launch his paper. He wanted me to write, under the title of "The Mysteries of Marseilles," a novel, the historical materials for which he proposed to supply me with, from researches made by himself at the Marseilles and Aix Law Courts, about the various *causes célèbres* which, during the previous fifty years, had attracted the most public attention. This journalistic idea was not a bit more foolish than other journalistic ideas; it was only unfortunate for him that he did not entrust its execution to a manufacturer of *feuilletons* with the gift of creating gigantic romantic machinations.

'I accepted his offer, though I felt that it was neither in accordance with my tastes nor with my capacities. At that time I was doing journalistic work very much more repulsive to me. He offered to pay me a penny a line, and I calculated that this work would bring me an income of about eight pounds a month, for nine months, which was an unhoped-for windfall. As soon as I had the documents, a huge mass of legal reports, I set to work, taking for the mainspring of the plot the most celebrated of the *causes célèbres* and trying to group around it, in one and a single story, all the others. True it is that the process was a coarse one, but in reading over the

proofs of this novel, some days ago, I was struck by the coincidence which, at a time when I was still groping my way, caused me to write this book, which was a mere manufacture, and, let me add, a bad manufacture, on a collection of true documents. Later on, when I was writing literary works, I had no different method.

'Well, then, during nine months I contributed two weekly *feuilletons*. At the same time I was writing "Thérèse Raquin," which was to bring me in twenty pounds, in the "Artiste," and having spent the whole morning on two pages of this novel, I used to turn out seven or eight pages of the "Mysteries of Marseilles" in one hour in the afternoon. I had earned my daily bread and could eat when night came.'

So wrote Zola in a preface to the 'Mysteries of Marseilles,' which was republished in 1884 by Charpentier. In the same preface he explains that if he authorised this republication of a book which was written under such circumstances, it was by way of answer to the many people who used to say that he had reason—and good reason too—to blush at his early writings. He adds that many of his critics, anxious to have an arm wherewith to attack him, used to search the bookstalls of Marseilles for hours for copies of the original edition, and would pay as much as thirty francs for a copy of the 'Mysteries.' 'I can only pity them,' writes Zola; 'they were

victims of a vile swindle, and most certainly did not get their money's worth. The idea that I have a skeleton to hide is so general a one that I frequently receive letters from Marseilles booksellers offering me copies of this book at a very high price—offers to which—need I say it?—I never make any answer.

'The simplest way to destroy this legend, then, is to reprint my novel. I have always written in the light of day, I have always said what it seemed to me that I had to say in a loud voice, and I have to take back neither a work nor an opinion of mine. People think to vex me sadly by exhuming from the enormous pile of prose which I had to write from day to day during ten years my bad pages. I am well aware that all this newspaper work is of no great value, but I was forced to earn my living, not having been born to literature with a fortune in my pocket. If in hours of distress I have had to turn my hand to all kinds of work, it is work of which I am not ashamed. I will say more. I will say that I am even proud of it.'

The 'Mysteries of Marseilles,' which cannot have done much for poor M. Arnaud's paper, the 'Messager de Provence,' and which were afterwards republished in Portalis's paper, 'Le Corsaire,' form a thick book of nearly five hundred closely-printed pages. It is in parts very well written; the style is

concise and clear, but, as is always the case with hack-work, there are too many passages which betray the author's dislike for the task, and communicate to the reader the same weariness that he must have felt.

CHAPTER VI

FEELING HIS WAY

For writing the 'Confession de Claude,' Zola had been called 'literary sewer-man' by the critics. His book 'Thérèse Raquin' was described by the same critics as 'putrid literature.' It was his first real success, and is, indeed, to this day considered by many his very best book.

He derived the idea on which the plot is founded from a novel contributed to the 'Figaro' by MM. Adolphe Belot and Ernest Daudet, the brother of Alphonse Daudet. This novel was entitled 'La Vénus de Gordes,' and was about the murder of a husband by the wife and her lover, and their trial in the Court of Assize. In criticising this book in the 'Figaro,' Zola pointed out that a much more powerful story might be written on this subject by invoking not human but divine justice, and showing the two accomplices, safe from earthly consequences, united after their crime, yet separated by the pool of blood that lay between them, haunted by their

crime, and hating each other for the thing that they had done in unison. It then occurred to Zola to write this story himself, and he set to work to do so. Convinced that the *donnée* was an excellent one, he elaborated the story with the greatest care, working at it slowly, and putting the best that was in him into it. It was commenced in 1866, whilst he was collaborating on De Villemessant's publication, and was continued under the circumstances which Zola himself relates in the preface to the 'Mystères de Marseille,' after he had removed to the Avenue de Clichy. It appeared, under the title of 'A Love Story,' in Arsène Houssaye's periodical 'L'Artiste,' to which Zola had previously contributed a long article on Manet, and the serial rights were paid for with twenty-four pounds. Unlike most of Zola's other *feuilletons*, it was allowed to run out without interruption on the part of the public, though in deference to Arsène Houssaye's request, who pointed out to Zola that the Empress read the magazine, the author consented to cut out certain passages which were afterwards reinserted when the story was published in book form. But on one thing Zola would not give way, and that was when Arsène Houssaye wanted to add from his own pen a few lines at the bottom of the last proof of the last instalment in which the moral of the story was pointed out. The discussion on this point very nearly brought about

a quarrel between the editor and the contributor, the latter, however, gaining the day, to the discomfiture of the author of 'Les Grandes Dames.' 'Thérèse Raquin,' as it was definitely called, afterwards appeared in book form, published by Lacroix, who had published Zola's other books. By the end of the year, or in January of 1868, a second edition was called for, whilst the 'Contes à Ninon' did not reach a second edition of a thousand copies for over ten years. It is true that a good deal of noise was made about this ghastliest of love stories. Louis Ulbach, a noted critic, who at that time was contributing to the 'Figaro' under the pseudonym of Ferragus, attacked it most violently, and it was he who applied to it the expression 'putrid literature.' De Villemessant authorised Zola to defend himself in the paper, and which he did, one may imagine, with considerable vigour. All this helped to advertise the book, which, as has been stated, was successful from the first.

It may be noted in connection with 'Thérèse Raquin,' that it was in his preface to this book that Zola first made use of the word *naturalisme*, which since has become his slogan in the literary fight. At that time the word *naturalisme*, as applied to a form of literature, had not been heard of.

Zola's next book was not a great success. Its name even will not sound familiar to his most

ardent admirers. This was a book entitled 'Madeleine Férat,' which was written in 1868. It was taken from a three-act play which Zola wrote in 1865, and which he had in vain tried to place with the managers. Montigny, of the Gymnase, said that it was 'impossible' that it would bring the house down otherwise than in the accepted sense of that expression; and Harmant, of the Vaudeville, on the other hand, described it as 'much too colourless.' It was never played nor published, but whole scenes were transferred by its author to the novel which he drew from it.

The process of taking a novel from a play, even as the inverse operation, is rarely successful. It did succeed, it is true, with Georges Ohnet, who, having first essayed in vain to place a drama entitled 'Le Maître de Forges,' rewrote the story in the form of a novel, with the amazing success that is known, and then turned it back again into a drama which ran for upwards of two years at the Gymnase Theatre in Paris.

'Madeleine Férat,' then, was drawn from a play of the same name. It was, first of all, published under the title of 'La Honte' in the new 'Evénement,' founded by M. Bauer after the demise of the one over which De Villemessant had presided. It threatened to ruin the paper, and before the angry clamour of his *abonnés* M. Bauer had to stop

its publication. It had, however, a certain sale in book form when it was published by Lacroix, and went into a second edition but no further.

Zola at this time was living in the pavilion or cottage in a garden at the back of a house in the rue Truffaut, which was, I fancy, the original of the dwelling of Sandoz in his book 'L'Œuvre,' just as Sandoz was a copy of himself. Although he had failed as a dramatic writer, he had made a certain mark as a journalist, and though his books had no very great success, they were talked about, and his originality at least was not contested. He had made several new friends, some of importance—as, for instance, the brothers Goncourt. The acquaintance had been made in 1865, when Zola had contributed to the 'Salut Public' of Lyons a most enthusiastic article about the novel, 'Germinie Lacerteux,' written by Jules and Edmond de Goncourt. This article, which may be found in the volume 'Mes Haines,' greatly pleased the two brother-collaborators, and they wrote to Zola to ask him to call on them at their little house at Auteuil, where he afterwards used to frequently visit. He also used to meet them at Michelet's at the great historian's evenings at home. Zola, it need not be said, was at the famous *première* of 'Henriette Maréchal' at the Français, when the De Goncourts' piece was damned by a cabal led by the legendary *Pipe-en-Bois*; and

need it be said that Zola was one of the few who tried to stem the tide of adversity that then and there swept over the brothers' dramatic ambitions. It may be recorded, as a matter of interest, that when 'Henriette Maréchal' was recently revived in Paris the original verdict of Paris was again rendered, if in politer terms, and that this time there was neither *Pipe-en-Bois* nor cabal against it.

The friendship between the De Goncourts and Zola was strengthened in later years when they used to meet at Gustave Flaubert's house. It seems that of late it has cooled off between Edmond de Goncourt and Emile Zola, and the fact that the former was not present at the *déjeuner* given in celebration of the completion of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series was a great deal commented upon in literary Paris.

The face of Alphonse Daudet was also missed at the celebration referred to, and those who did not know in what very poor health he is, living down at his country house at Champ Rozay, in Seine-et-Oise, wondered at his absence. For Alphonse Daudet was Zola's friend from the very first, and seems to have acted towards him with the same unswerving loyalty that has always distinguished this great-hearted genius.

At the time that is being written about, however, Zola and Daudet had but a slight acquaintance of each other, from occasional meetings at the 'Evéne-

ment' office. Daudet at that time being engaged in contributing to the 'Evénement' his wonderful 'Lettres de Mon Moulin.'

A great friend of Zola's was a certain Duranty, who, ignored by posterity, was in the sixties and seventies considered a man of great literary and critical importance. Zola had made his acquaintance whilst an *employé* at Hachette's, when Duranty used to come to the publishing office to fetch copies of new books for review in a Lyons paper to which he contributed. He was the very opposite of Zola in every point—a cold, stiff, formal little man—and this was, perhaps, one of the reasons of their friendship. Both had the highest esteem for each other's talent, which was as diametrically opposite as was their physical temperament, and for years Zola never wrote a book without wondering to himself what Duranty would think about it. Duranty does not seem to have approved of the tendencies of the naturalistic school, whilst admitting that Zola was endowed with a wonderful gift of assimilation and of perfectibility. Zola's example and perhaps his success seem, in the end, to have fired his friend with the desire to write a novel also, his literary productions till then having been limited to critical studies; but his ambition was never destined to be realised, for he died a few days after he had told Zola of his intentions.

Duranty and Zola used frequently to go together to a literary *salon*—there were *salons* in those days in Paris, presided over by Madame Meurice, the charming wife of Paul Meurice, to whom Zola had been introduced by the painter Manet. It was the rendezvous of the romantics, with whom Zola—who was recently described by Francisque Sarcey in a review of 'Le Docteur Pascal' as 'the last, the most passionate, and the most illustrious of the sons of romanticism'—considered himself at that time in open warfare. The cultus of Victor Hugo was here practised, and Zola, although himself a deep admirer of the exiled poet who had had such an influence on his youth, seemed to revolt against such entire hero-worship. One day, hearing Balzac attacked, he burst out into an impassioned defence of the merits of the author of the 'Human Comedy,' which must have greatly surprised and shocked his listeners.

It was *chez* Madame Paul Meurice that the 'Rappel' newspaper was founded—a circumstance which will explain why almost from its outset it was the official organ of the glory of Victor Hugo. Zola was one of the founders and first contributors, only accepting M. Meurice's offer on the condition that places on the staff should be found for certain Provençal friends—Paul Alexis amongst others. His connection with the 'Rappel' lasted about two

years and terminated suddenly after the appearance of an article on Balzac in which Zola repeated, with additions, the panegyric with which he had so shocked the *habitués* of Madame Meurice's *salon*. For some years a kind of armistice between the romantiques, as represented by Vacquerie and Meurice, and the naturalists, as represented by Emile Zola, ensued, in which certain courtesies of log-rolling were exchanged, the 'Rappel' criticising the Rougon-Macquart novels in a friendly spirit in exchange for Zola's friendly criticisms on M. Vacquerie's 'Mes Premières Années à Paris' in 'La Cloche,' of which at that time M. Zola was a contributor. Later on, however, the two parties affected to ignore each other, so that Zola's name was never even mentioned in the 'Rappel.'

It was *chez* Madame Meurice that Zola made the acquaintance of a young poet, with a Napoleon-like profile, who ever since has been a warm admirer of his, though their paths in literature are diametrically opposite. This was François Coppée, who had just finished 'Le Passant,' which, played at the Odéon, was to make his name and to give Madame Sarah Bernhardt her first chance of emerging from the obscurity which then environed her. Romantic then, as now, it seems strange that Coppée should have won Zola's heart, and still more so that Zola should have inspired Coppée with such

Etched by G. Brocourt and C. Maugeret
Emile Zola

deep admiration, that ever since Zola first entered himself as a candidate for the French Academy he has had no warmer supporter than the romantic poet whose acquaintance he made in Madame Meurice's *salon*. It is true that François Coppée has the largest of hearts, and, on the other hand, is the least militant of men. There never was even for a moment any competition between him and Zola as there was between Zola and other friends of his youth, from whom he has since separated himself.

Zola's twenty-eighth birthday, then, found him in this position. He had written and published six novels, of which two, 'Thérèse Raquin' and 'Madeleine Férat,' had reached second editions, and another, 'La Confession de Claude,' had attracted the attention of the police authorities. Besides these novels, he had also published a collection of art critiques, under the title of 'Mon Salon,' reprinted from the 'Evénement.' He had made his mark as a journalist, and by his pen had won for himself many friends, and, what was still more important for a young writer, a number of influential enemies. He was discussed, attacked, defended—in other words, he had imposed his personality. He was somebody; he had made his mark in Paris. Still, so far he himself felt it, he had not struck the note of his individuality—his real work still lay

before him. To grapple with this task he was at least admirably equipped by temperament and by education, for while misery and privation, having no secrets from him, had equally no terrors, he had learned to school himself to work and method—the two best weapons wherewith to fight the world. Paris had never been able to lure him from his duty. The song of the sirens, by which may be understood the pleasures of the boulevard, had fallen on deaf ears. Such success as he had had, and which, such as it was, would have intoxicated many a less hard-headed man, had only stimulated him to further effort. His place, he felt, was not amongst the little heroes of Tortoni's, it was in his workroom, and it was only for the purpose of mixing with the masters, or with those from whose intercourse he could derive benefit and instruction, that he ever went out into society. He was a terribly earnest young man, and terribly in earnest.

It was under these circumstances and with this equipment that he set to work on the task which, diligently pursued for upwards of a quarter of a century, was to make his name universally known, and to consecrate him one of the masters, if not the master, of French literature in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER VII

THE 'ROUGON-MACQUART:' 'LA FORTUNE DES ROUGONS'—'LA CURÉE'

VARIOUS were the causes that prompted Zola to the gigantic task of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series of novels, which he has so recently completed. One of these, no doubt, was the example of his acknowledged master, Balzac, to whom, however, the idea of an *œuvre générale*—that is to say, of a series of novels connected with and proceeding from each other—only came after a certain number of the volumes composing the 'Comédie Humaine' had been written. Still, the example of the creation of a collection of novels embracing one immense subject, and thus forming one gigantic whole, had been set, and the magnitude of the task, as well as the end to be attained in case of success, were enough to stimulate the ambitious young writer.

Then, again, it seemed to him that there was here as yet untrodden ground to be explored. The question of heredity was then, as it is practically to-day,

a quarter of a century later, what Zola recently described as a lisping science, a science yet at nurse, in the domain of which poets and authors are still masters. 'For here,' he added, 'there is a large margin of territory, as yet unexplored, open to their investigations. Nobody can come and say that one is wrong in his deductions, because nobody knows much about the science, and so the author can set up a theory without fear of definite refutation.'

Another consideration was, that if he could get a publisher to back him in his plan of writing a number of novels connected one with the other, he would have a certain amount of work, and, by the same token, a certain assured income to depend upon.

The question of heredity and its influences had long preoccupied him, as may be traced in 'Madeleine Férat,' the plot of which is based upon certain physiological problems. It will be remembered also that even as a schoolboy Zola had shown a marked taste for scientific research.

It will also be remembered that, as quite a young writer, his desire to *faire grand*, as the French say, had more than once revealed itself. His 'Amoureuse Comédie' was such a work; the 'Genèse,' which he planned out whilst starving in his garret, and which was to cover the whole history of humanity, would have been, had he been able to carry out his plan,

a vaster work than even the one to which he had now determined to devote himself.

After pondering for some time on the question of the form in which he should present his ideas on hereditary influence to the public, he hit on the idea of a family, each member of which should form the subject of one novel, each novel being in some sort the development of the work, and closely connected with one or other of the preceding ones. The title 'L'Histoire Naturelle et Sociale d'une Famille sous le Second Empire' was soon hit upon, and what then remained to be done before setting to work was to study up the question of heredity, which was to play such a part in the actions of the various members of this family. This was towards the end of 1868, and for eight months Zola gave himself up to study, visiting the National, then the Imperial Library, and reading up all the books on physiology and natural history that he considered likely to be of service for his purpose. A certain 'Traité de l'Hérédité Naturelle,' by Dr. Lucas, was especially studied. Having filled his head and his note-book with information on his subject, Zola sketched out the general plan of the series, which at that time was to comprise twelve novels. He then drew up the genealogical tree, which was afterwards published on the first page of 'Une Page d'Amour'—a fact to be noted when it is remembered that the critics of that book declared

that this genealogical tree had been invented at the time 'Une Page d'Amour' was written, so as to give an air of plausibility to the author's pretensions that he was working out a well-defined literary scheme. And it should be noted that it is Zola's chief glory, as it is his chief pride, that it has been a scheme which he has been working out for the last quarter of a century, and which he has brought to a successful close after such a quarter of a century's toil. That certain modifications were necessary in the general scheme, as may be seen by a comparison of the genealogical tree referred to above, and the one to be found in 'Le Docteur Pascal,' will surprise nobody, Zola having moved with his times, and being nothing if not a progressist.

The scheme having been elaborated, Zola drew up a contract which he took to his publisher, M. Lacroix, who, having made a certain amount of profit with both 'Confession de Claude' and 'Thérèse Raquin,' was likely to be favourably disposed to the speculation.

Zola proposed to supply Lacroix with twelve novels at the rate of two novels a year. Lacroix was to pay him five hundred francs, or twenty pounds, a month, which sums were to be considered advances on his part. Lacroix was to reimburse himself out of the serial rights of each novel, and, after his advances had been covered, was to allow

Zola a royalty of fourpence per copy of the novel sold in book form. It may be mentioned that at that time a royalty of fivepence a copy was considered very liberal remuneration, De Goncourt himself not receiving more—a circumstance which proves that in drawing up his contract Emile Zola did not set too low an appreciation on his own work. M. Lacroix, however, would not engage himself for more than four out of the twelve novels, and with this condition the contract was signed. It was not, however, destined to be carried out, and, far from assuring to Zola that tranquillity that he had hoped for, plunged him into the worst difficulties. Each time that he received his five hundred francs he signed a promissory note for this sum at three months, to be renewed, according to the clauses of the contract, until the delivery of the manuscript. Now, owing to circumstances, his original idea of supplying and publishing two novels a year could not be carried out. As a matter of fact, only two volumes of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series were published in the three years that followed the signing of the contract, at the end of which period, what with renewals, legal expenses, and so forth, Zola found himself with over thirty thousand francs worth of paper signed by him against his name. It was only in 1875, M. Lacroix having bankrupted in the meanwhile, that he was able to settle the matter by

paying over the balance due from him to the estate of the bankrupt; and in the meanwhile he had had more than once to face that most unpleasant of domestic events, the seizure by *huissier* of his goods and chattels.

It was in May 1869 that Zola set to work on the first novel of the series, which he had now decided should be entitled the 'Rougon-Macquart.' He spent several days in thinking out a name for the family whose adventures he proposed to describe, and in this connection his own words on the subject of names in fiction may be read with interest.

Speaking to me on the subject, he said: 'I may say that I have a great faith in names, that I consider the author's choice in this matter a science. I myself often spend days together over the Bottin or Paris Directory making out a list of names which strike me as valuable and likely to be useful, and a much longer time in finally deciding which of the names on the list which I have made out from that source I can use. I am quite a fatalist in this matter, believing firmly that a mysterious correlation exists between the man and the name he bears. Thus I always judge a young author by the names he bestows on his characters. If the names seem to me to be weak, or to be unsuitable to the people who bear them, I put the author down as a man of little talent, and am no longer greatly interested in his book.

Names should possess a consonance to the ear. A dissonance between a character in a book and the name bestowed upon him by the author is a very grave defect. True it is that there are historical characters who had names which were not at all suitable to them. Racine, for instance, a word meaning a root, and which might as easily have been Carotte, or carrot—an ugly, stupid name, if ever there was one. In his case, however, the talent of the man has invested it with dignity. Corneille, too. *Corneille* is only another word for *corbeau*, or crow. One would find a man named Crow ridiculous, but in Corneille's case also the man's genius is the apologist of his name. In his case, as in that of Racine, and of others that I could mention, we have in the end grown accustomed to the point of no longer noticing it to the dissonance between the name and the man. But in presenting new characters to the public this dissonance must be avoided. It is one of the first rules of the novelist's art. Bad authors choose bad names. Oh, yes, I am all for well-chosen names, even as Balzac and Dumas and George Sand were. Some of my names I consider great discoveries, as Sacchar, for instance, and Cornu-Gradel. As to the name of the family, the composite Rougon-Macquart. Rougon is a common name in the South, where the genesis of my family is laid, and has something majestic and dignified about it which Macquart has not.

Thus the legitimate and the illegitimate branches of the family are thrown into contrast. Macquart, base and vulgar as it is, contrasts with the dignity of Rougon, and the combination of the two names as the name of a family prepares the reader for a vast difference in the characteristics of the various members of that family, which was just the effect that I desired to produce.'

The name of the series being decided upon—and let Balzac's influence in this respect, mere detail as it is, be noted—Zola's plan of campaign was drawn out. His method of writing his books never having varied from the first to the last, and being the secret of his colossal production, is worthy of description.

In sitting down to a novel he has never any idea what it is to be about, and be it remarked *en passant* that he has never attached much importance to mere plot, and the first thing that he does is to prepare an *ébauche*, or sketch. This he does pen in hand, because he finds that ideas only come to him when he is writing. He declared to me that he could never evolve a single idea by sitting still in his chair and thinking. He writes as though he were talking to himself, discussing the people, the scenes, the incidents. His *ébauche* is a sort of chatty letter addressed to himself, which often equals, where it does not exceed in length, the novel which is to spring from it. He then draws out a plan of the book, a

list of the characters, and a most elaborate and detailed *scenario*. Each character and each scene is then studied in detail, and wherever possible *de visu*. Incidents are then prepared for insertion in the story where available. It is only then, having actually written much more than the novel itself, that he sets to work to write it. The text of the sketch is rarely used at all, at most a phrase or two which may seem felicitous.

His novels have always been written in the morning directly after breakfast, which for many years has consisted of a couple of fried eggs without liquid of any kind. His table is always kept in the most methodical order, each item having its place, another detail in which Balzac's example may have served. He writes very slowly and methodically, forming each sentence before it is put into black and white, and with so much deliberation that he rarely, if ever, has to make any erasures or corrections in his manuscript. His daily task, as far as his novel-writing is concerned, has been four pages of print of the Charpentier form of volume daily, and he has never done more nor less, laying down the pen the moment that this amount has been produced, no matter whether he may be in the midst of a sentence. His plan is so clear in his head that he can resume his work on the following morning without having to read over anything of what pre-

cedes. He is a slow writer, and seems to have difficulty in the mere mechanical operation of penmanship. Four pages, not a line more nor less, day after day without interruption for years and years, line upon line, line upon line, this has been the secret of a literary production which has not its equal amongst living writers. As Paul Alexis writes: 'Only four pages, but four pages every day, every day without exception, the action of the drop of water always falling on the same place, and in the end wearing out the hardest stone. It seems nothing, but in course of time chapters follow upon chapters, volumes follow upon volumes, and a whole life's work sprouts, multiplies its branches, extends its foliage like a lofty oak, destined to rise high into the air and to remain standing in the forest of human productions.'

All the more credit is due to Zola for this industry and this perseverance that he has never taken great pleasure in his work. It has always given him pain and anxiety, and, as he makes Sandoz say in 'L'Œuvre,' he has always envied those *littérateurs* who turn out prose whilst smoking cigarettes and tickling their beards. As for him, it is with the knife that he brings forth. The book in progress is a sore fardel on his back, and when it is over he turns from it with the same relief, if not rancour, as a porter whose back has been galled a whole summer's day

with some heavy burthen which he has been forced to bear.

As to the author's views on literature at the time that he sat down to the 'Rougon-Macquart' series, let me quote from an article from his pen which appeared in the 'Gaulois' on March 26 of that same year, 1869. In a few words the passage gives his literary creed.

He wrote:—'Si je tenais école de morale, je m'empresserais de mettre entre les mains de mes élèves Madame Bovary ou Germinie Lacerteux, persuadé que la vérité seule peut instruire et fortifier les âmes généreuses.'

It will be remembered that the author of 'Madame Bovary' was prosecuted—unsuccessfully it is true—for the alleged immorality of this book.

Some months before, it may be recorded, Zola published in an article contributed to 'La Tribune' the following profession *de foi*: 'J'emprunterais aux sciences leurs larges horizons, leurs hypothèses si admirables qu'elles sont peut-être des vérités. Il faut nous séparer violemment de l'Ecole lyrique de 1830. Si j'étais poète, voici ce que je ferais. Faut-il l'avouer, je serais savant. Je voudrais être un nouveau Lucrèce. Rêve de réconciler la poésie et la science.'

Zola's constant preoccupation to leaven poetry

with science, that is to say with truth, is here clearly formulated by him.

Zola set to work on the first of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series—'La Fortune des Rougons'—in May 1869, with such ardour that he was soon able to supply the editor of 'Le Siècle' with the first chapters for publication in that journal in serial form. His enemies, however, succeeded in influencing the editor of 'Le Siècle' against him, so that the publication of the book was delayed until June of the following year. The war breaking out interrupted its publication again, and it was not published in book form until the winter of 1871.

In the 'Fortune des Rougons' Zola's object was to describe the origin of the family with which he proposed to deal in his series, and to give the outlines of the various principal characters, members of that family. We find in it Tante Dide, the Doctor Pascal, and his mother as well as others of the family, whose final development is described in the last volume, published twenty-two years later, 'Le Docteur Pascal.' Plassans, the town which Zola describes at such length in the 'Fortune des Rougons,' is Aix, but an Aix reconstructed for the author's purposes. This part of the book, Zola having no money to spend in a visit to Aix for a topographical study of the place, was written from his souvenirs of the town where he had spent so much of his youth, and is

perhaps the only part of the whole of Zola's work where imagination has supplanted actual fact. This preoccupation of his to describe as closely as possible from nature will transpire when we take a look behind the scenes later on.

Zola has often told me that were he to begin the series over again he should call Aix, Aix and nothing else. At that time, however, he was young, and was afraid of giving offence to the people of the town, who might have suspected him of making personal allusions, and who would have found names for the various characters. The description of the insurrection in Plassans was written from details which he found in M. Tenet's 'History of the Coup d'État.'

Paul Alexis describes a visit which he paid to Zola in September of 1869, whilst the 'Fortune des Rougons' was being written.

'There, where the Avenue de Clichy divides into two, at the point known as "the Fork," Valabrégue and I jumped down off our omnibus, and after a few paces down the street to the left we find ourselves ringing at the door of No. 14 of the rue Condamine. My heart beat high. Zola's first words were: "Ah! here is Alexis. I expected you." At the first grasp of our hands I felt that the die was cast, that I had just bestowed my whole heart, and that I could now count on the solid affection of an elder brother. I can see myself again in the dining-room of a little

cottage which he then occupied at the bottom of a garden, in the narrow dining-room—so narrow that when he later on bought a piano, he had to cut a hole in the wall to make room for it—seated before the round table, which the mother and the wife of the novelist had just cleared.'

Zola had married in July of this year.

'After an hour's chat, during which he had made me talk at length about myself, about my plans, about our dear Provence, which, after eleven years of absence, he still loved dearly, the conversation took a turn, and he spoke to me, in his turn, of himself, of his work, of the big scheme of the "Rougon-Macquart," of the first volume then on the work-table. Then tea having been served, having at my request fetched the manuscript, he read me the first pages of "La Fortune des Rougons," all that description of the "aire Saint-Mittre" at Plassans which I recognised as the Aix which I had just left.' Zola did what he could for his new friend. I remember reading an article which he published about that time, in which he spoke of Alexis, the poet who rhymes as one sings.

Zola, being the only son of a widow, was not called upon to serve in the war, a circumstance which he has described himself as regretting when he came to write 'La Débâcle.' Having finished 'La Fortune des Rougons,' indeed, before he had quite finished

this book, the publication having been interrupted, he began upon 'La Curée,' which many of his admirers consider one of the finest of the series. It was written in four months, but was not published until some time after the war, when it appeared in part in a journal called 'La Cloche.' The scene in the private room in the Café Riche shocked the authorities. Zola was invited to call at the Prefecture of Police, and was there very politely but very earnestly recommended to discontinue the publication of this tale in serial form. This he did in order to be able to publish it as a book, a form of publication over which the Prefecture had no direct control.

'La Curée' gave him a great deal of trouble, the scene of the action being laid in a sphere of society into which he had never penetrated. To describe the carriages of his lofty personages alone, he had to pay several visits to the leading carriage-builders of Paris. Saccard's magnificent mansion, described in this book, was a pen photograph of the hotel of M. Menier, the rich chocolate manufacturer, which may be seen to this day at one of the entrances to the Parc Monceau. That is to say that the exterior was described from nature, the interior, however, from imagination, as M. Zola did not know Menier at that time. When he afterwards made his acquaintance and entered the hotel which some years

before he had so carefully studied from the outside, he much regretted that he had not had the boldness, at the time that he was writing 'La Curée,' to solicit the permission to visit the interior, his imagination having fallen far short of the reality of the splendour and luxury with which the millionaire Menier had fitted up the house in which Zola lodged his Saccard. Renée's large conservatory was described after the conservatory in the Jardin des Plantes, where he spent several afternoons, having obtained special authorisation to do so, and from which he brought home to his study a note-book well filled with his observations on the strangest and rarest of plants. But what gave him most trouble was the particulars as to the work carried out by Baron Haussmann, the streets that had been pulled down and the entire new quarters that had been built. Jules Ferry's rather spiteful pamphlet, 'Les Comptes Fantastiques d'Haussmann,' helped him a little, but the best material was furnished, after a long search, by the bills of costs of a number of contractors who had worked for Haussman, which he was fortunate enough to gain possession of. 'La Curée' was published as a volume by Lacroix in October 1872.

It was shortly after the publication of the second volume of the series that Lacroix failed, and that Zola changed publishers, offering the publication of the continuation of the series to M. George Char-

pentier, who has been his publisher ever since. Charpentier accepted Zola's offer, purchased from Lacroix the right to republish the two volumes of the series which had already appeared, 'La Fortune des Rougons' and 'La Curée,' for a sum of 800 francs, and drew up a new agreement with their author. According to this agreement Zola was to continue to supply two novels a year, and Charpentier was to pay him 500 francs a month, or 240*l.*, the two novels to become the publisher's entire property for publication in any form that might please him for a period of ten years. 'Le Ventre de Paris,' 'La Conquête de Plassans,' and 'La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret' were written and published under these conditions.

Charpentier displayed a good deal of courage and showed no small intuition in signing this agreement, for though Zola was at that time already—although still comparatively young—fairly well known in Paris, his books did not sell well, none of his past works, including the first two volumes of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series, having exceeded two editions of a thousand copies each. It may be remarked that to-day the twenty-seventh edition of 'La Fortune des Rougons,' and the thirty-sixth edition of 'La Curée' are on sale in Paris; but this is twenty-one years later.

After the publication of 'La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret,' Zola found himself, by the clauses of his

agreement with M. Charpentier, indebted to his publisher for advances in several thousand francs, besides being behindhand with three volumes, which should have been supplied. One day, feeling by no means at ease on the subject, he called on Charpentier, whose place of business was at that time situated on the Quai du Louvre, and asked for an interview and an explanation with his publisher. It was then that Charpentier produced the agreement and tore it up in Zola's face, saying: 'My dear friend, I don't want to rob you. I don't want to make more out of you than my usual fair profit. I have just had your account made up on the basis of a royalty of fourpence a copy sold, and, far from your being in my debt, I find that you are my creditor for something over ten thousand francs. Will you be kind enough to see my cashier and to receive payment of this sum. In the future you will be credited with a royalty of fourpence for every copy of your book that is sold.'

Some months later Charpentier raised the royalty to fivepence a copy, thus putting Zola on a par with Edmond de Goncourt. Flaubert at that time was receiving a royalty of sixpence a copy, or considerably over 20 per cent. of the discount sale price of his books. Charpentier's publications are issued at three francs fifty centimes, or rather less than three shillings each, but the volumes are invariably retailed

by the Paris booksellers at two francs seventy-five centimes. Out of this sum of two francs seventy-five centimes paid by the purchaser of one of Zola's books, the author at first received fourpence a copy, and later fivepence. He now receives a royalty of sixpence a copy, and earns an average of twelve thousand pounds a year.

CHAPTER VIII

THE 'ROUGON-MACQUART:' 'LE VENTRE DE PARIS'—'LA CONQUÊTE DE PLASSANS'—'LA FAUTE DE L'ABBÉ MOURET'—'SON EXCELLENCE EUGÈNE ROUGON.'

THE next book was 'Le Ventre de Paris,' a description of life in and around the Halles or Central Markets of Paris. This was a subject with which Zola had long been anxious to deal, considering the Halles very justly as one of the most interesting features of modern Parisian life, and being, as he often expressed himself, greatly tempted to try his hand at a faithful reproduction of the most marvellous piece of still-life which it is given to a man to see. And besides, he knew very well that there were all kinds of interesting characters and types to be studied in this little corner of the Paris world: the peasants, who from all directions around Paris nightly bring in their wares for sale at the morning market; the market-women, or *dames des Halles*, a corporation of their own, and who for centuries have maintained and jealously watched over their traditions, their

privileges, and even their particular language, the most independent of women indeed, earning large fortunes, staunchly conservative of the established order of the day, and who as a class were very well typified by the ever-famous Madame Angot of the *opéra comique*; the various officials appointed by the Municipal Council of Paris to keep order amongst these ladies and to enforce the regulations imposed by the law, and by reason of their duties, to some extent in constant warfare with their subordinates; the market-porters, or *forts des Halles*, men of huge strength, whose gigantic mushroom-shaped hats and flour-dusty blouses give a peculiar characteristic to the French markets—men who, like the *dames des Halles*, belong to a corporation which has special privileges and enjoys certain monopolies of fardel-bearing, over which they as jealously watch as do the ladies for whom they work, over their privileges, traditions, and monopolies. And, further, around and depending upon these, the gleaners of the great city, the Bohemians, the outcasts who frequent the market-places, these in the hope of an odd job, these for the sake of the shelter that is afforded against the weather under the roofs of the immense pavilions, and those on the look-out for an opportunity for theft. Already in 1872, at that time working at the office of the 'Cloche' newspaper in the rue du Coq-Héron, Zola had had this book in mind. Alexis

relates that many a time, as they were leaving the 'Cloche' together, Zola would insist on his accompanying him to the Halles, which are quite close by, and would repeat over and over again, 'What a grand book there is to be written about this monster monument!' Together the two friends used to wander about the market-place in every direction. One day as they were walking home up the rue Montmartre, Zola turns round and points and cries, 'Look, look, I say!' The effect, writes Alexis, was marvellous. The Halles seen in the dusk looked like palaces of Babylon rising one above the other. Zola was at once out with his note-book and set to work to write down a description of this scene. Afterwards visiting it at all times of the day and in all kinds of weather, he filled the same note-book with pen-pictures of its varying aspects, under rain, under snow, at early morning, at noon when the mighty heart is lying still, and at night when it is already beginning to prepare for the labours of the following morning.

On one occasion he spent a whole night there so as to be present at the arrival from all parts of France and of Europe of the daily food of the city, and to watch the special population of this quarter in their various activities.

Making the acquaintance of one of the officials, he was able to explore the cellars which are below

the market-houses, and to visit the galleries on the roof, from which wonderful *coups d'œil* of the place and of the neighbouring quarter were to be obtained and could be carefully described in a pen-picture in the ever-ready note-book. But all these investigations were very far from supplying him with sufficient material for the book that he had to write. Indeed, it was when all the *mise en scène* had been studied as described, that Zola's real difficulties commenced. He had to find out all about the organisation of the market services; how this mighty commercial concern was managed and how worked; how the police interfered and in what way; to study to the last tiny little cogwheel the whole machinery of this colossal enterprise. Several days spent in research at the National Library gave little or no results. Beyond a chapter in Maxime du Camp's 'Paris: sa Vie et ses Organes,' there was nothing to be found about Les Halles, and what Du Camp had written was altogether insufficient, no particulars being given about the management, or about many of the most interesting sides of the concern that Zola wished to study and to describe. Zola then addressed himself to the police and was badly enough received, as it appears. To-day, no doubt, the whole Prefecture would place itself at his disposition; but at that time he was little known and possessed no great influence, and very little atten-

tion was paid to his request for information by the Prefecture bureaucrats. Zola, however, was determined to succeed, it not being in his nature to accept defeat, and after persistent inquiries and investigation was fortunate enough to make the acquaintance of one of the *employés*, who formerly had been a friend of Delvau, the author of 'Paris Ignoré,' and who assisted Zola in every way in his power, telling him all he knew about the Halles regulations and allowing him to copy out all the police ordinances concerning the government of the market-place.

Thanks to this information Zola was able to begin upon his book. He himself looked upon it as a sort of modern 'Iliad,' the song of the eternal battle between the lean of this world and the fat—a battle in which, as he shows, the latter always come off successful. It is in its way an allegory of the triumph over the gaunt and Ishmael artist of the fat *bourgeois* who lives well and beds soft—an allegory which Zola has more than once introduced into his pages, another notable instance thereof being to be found in 'Germinal,' with the fat, well-fed Grégoires on the one hand, and the starving Maheus on the other.

'Le Ventre de Paris' was violently attacked on its appearance, and is even to-day one of the books of Zola which is the most discussed, and there are still amongst those whom the author's subsequent

work has won over who still are unreconciled to much in this book, and especially to the famous chapter in which Zola describes, by comparing them to musical sounds, the various odours arising, on a hot summer's day, from a cheesemonger's shop. Zola has always considered 'Le Ventre de Paris' as a symphony, in the musical sense of the word—a symphony of eating, of the stomach—the triumphal song of a town's digestion. In point of sales 'Le Ventre' was one of the least successful of the series. To-day the thirty-third edition is on the Paris bookstalls.

M. Charpentier has never permitted himself to interfere in the least with M. Zola's work. Still, it is a fact that after the appearance of 'Le Ventre de Paris,' when a prominent critic had declared that he had only been able to read it by holding his nose whilst so doing, the publisher asked M. Zola to be rather less realistic, if it were possible, in his next book—to draw it, if one may make use of a very expressive slang expression, 'rather more mild.' This request coincided, however, entirely with Zola's own wishes on the subject, it being always his plan to vary his effects, so that in the series the violent and the mild novels may almost be said to alternate.

Indeed, even before the 'Ventre de Paris' was finished, Zola was preparing for his next novel, which was to be entitled 'La Conquête de Plassans.'

Very little preparation was requisite for this book beyond the drawing up of the scheme or plan. Many of Zola's early recollections of life at Aix were worked into the book. The story of Mouret's madness was borrowed from one of Zola's short stories which, some years previously, he had contributed to the 'Evénement' under the title of 'Histoire d'un Fou,' which describes the character of a man who, being perfectly sane, is popularly believed to be mad, and who, in the end, by force of being considered mad by everybody, really becomes so. Zola worked this book out with his usual whole-souledness of attention and perseverance, but seems to have had little satisfaction in so doing. The book is one of the series of which the least number of copies have been sold—a trifle of twenty-five thousand in all.

The next book was 'La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret,' in which, as Zola says, he allowed himself a grand artistic debauch. This work is divided into three distinct parts. In between the first and the last parts, in which realism is closely kept in view, is given a fantasia—a sort of poem in prose—which is the essence of Zola's 'Genèse,' the poem, it will be remembered, that was never written, but was for so long so fondly thought over.

'La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret' was written in 1874. Zola was at that time living in a small house in the rue St. Georges in the Batignolles. It was

a very hot summer and Zola was longing to be away in the country, but with characteristic caution preferred to avoid the expense, and so remained all through the dog-days of the year working hard and living as much alone almost as if he and his wife had been on a desert island. He never went out, and received no visits, except, perhaps, from time to time, a call from his devoted friend, Paul Alexis. 'I remember,' writes Alexis, 'how once or twice he read me passages of the book that he was writing that year out in his garden at the back of his house, surrounded by high walls.' Immense preparation had been necessary for the 'Faute de l'Abbé Mouret.' Mountains of note-books were heaped up on his table, and for months Zola was plunged in the study of religious works. All the mystical part of the book, and notably the passages having reference to the cultus of Mary, was taken from the works of the Spanish Jesuits. The 'Imitation of Jesus Christ' was largely drawn upon, many passages being copied almost word for word into the novel—much as in 'Clarissa Harlowe,' that other great realist, Richardson, copied whole passages from the Psalms. The description of life in a grand seminary was given him by a priest who had been dismissed from ecclesiastical service. The little church of Sainte Marie des Batignolles was regularly visited. *A propos* of this Alexis writes: 'The few devotees who attend

early mass must, at that time, have been edified by the sight of a man sitting away by himself, his prayer-book in his hand, following with the greatest attention the slightest movements of the priest. This man was present at several masses day after day, and might have been seen now and then furtively and hurriedly scribbling down a few words on the margin of his prayer-book with a stump of pencil which he held concealed in his hand. Well, this most attentive amongst the faithful was none other than the author of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series, preparing his 'Faute de l'Abbé Mouret.' I remember accompanying him one morning on one of these expeditions and assisting, without great comprehension of what was going on around me, at a representation of that mysterious drama which is called 'a mass.' To understand it in every detail Zola was obliged to buy and study a number of manuals which are specially prepared for the use of the clergy.

The description of the Paradou garden was also carefully prepared. It is true, as has been said, that horticulturists' catalogues helped the author somewhat—at least as to the nomenclature of the plants in the garden—but it is also true that he did not limit his investigations to these, visiting exhibitions and studying the various flowers from nature. A wild estate, which sixteen years ago he had often

explored in company of his two inseparable friends, a place called 'Galice,' which was situated between Aix and Roquefavour, gave him the idea of the 'Paradou.' He may, perhaps, also have thought of the wild garden at Aix, in which his early childhood had been spent.

'La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret' having been written and published, and received with the same indifference by the public as the preceding volumes of the series, Zola quietly set to work on the sixth volume of the series, 'Son Excellence Eugène Rougon.' Here Zola was again entirely out of his depth. He knew as little about the official world of the Second Empire as he had known about the financial world when he wrote 'La Curée.' To give realistic descriptions of the Imperial Court at Compiègne, of a cabinet council of ministers, to show a prime minister in his functions and attributes, to bring the Emperor himself on to the scene, and to make Napoleon III. live and speak as he had lived and spoken, was all a very difficult task for a man whose life had been so far removed from these spheres. Still, he was not quite a stranger to parliamentary matters, having been employed at 'La Cloche,' and for a space of eighteen months, in reporting the meetings of the National Assembly, and was thus master of at least the *technique* and special vocabulary of legislature. A book entitled 'Souvenirs d'un Valet

de Chambre' gave him nearly all that he required about Compiègne and the life there. Gustave Flaubert, who had frequently been invited to Court, was able to supply him with a great deal of interesting and useful information about the Emperor, his appearance, his turn of wit, his way of speaking, his habits, and so forth. The chapter in which the baptism of the Prince Imperial is described gave much trouble. The accounts published in the official 'Moniteur' at the time were very incomplete, and had to be largely supplemented. But what gave the most trouble was the geography of Paris at the time that the action took place, whole quarters having since then been changed, streets having been pulled down and others built. These details alone involved many weeks of unremitting labour and research.

As to the characters in this book, it was stated at the time, and is still thought by many, that 'Son Excellence Eugène Rougon' was a novel *à clef*—that is to say, that a number of real persons were described in it under transparent disguises. Zola has always denied this. Eugène Rougon is not, as has been stated, Eugène Rouher.

In connection with this, it may be of interest to reproduce M. Zola's own remarks, taken from a conversation which he had in 1880 with M. Xau.

'It is incontestable,' said M. Xau, 'that your novels are, above all, the result of close observation.

You have followed each one of your characters step by step, you have studied his life, dissected his past, diagnosed his evil. I fancy I could put names on most, if not all, the characters of your novels which deal with Paris life, especially in respect of "Nana." At the same time, it seems to me that these characters proceed from something more than mere observation.'

'Report will have it,' replied M. Zola with vivacity, 'that I am but a scrupulous photographer, and at the same time an abominable punster. Side by side with the names of my characters have been placed the names of people well known to all except to me. Little did it matter whether or not there existed between these and those any real resemblance of character. The similitude of their names sufficed; so that, as a matter of fact, I was considered as reduced to the necessity of making puns on the names of well-known people. You must admit that that is not very flattering to me. I am not surprised to hear you speak of this legend; it dates from long ago. The whole plan of the "Rougon-Macquart" series was prepared and drawn out as far back as 1868—that is to say, long before the fall of the Empire. "La Conquête de Plassans" appeared before the war. Could I foresee that the Empire would fall in so short a time from then? Evidently not. Nevertheless, people persisted in seeing in "Son Excellence Eugène

Rougon," and still persist in so seeing, the character of M. Rouher. I admit that the names of Eugène Rougon strangely resemble those of Eugène Rouher, but it is all the same a matter of fact that I chose the name of Rougon because it is very common in the South and has a pleasant sound to the ear, and that I chose the Christian name of Eugène absolutely by chance, just as I might have chosen Oscar, Emile, Edmond, or Pancratius. Still, the public will never believe that that was so. . . . It will seize upon one or two traits of character which Eugène Rougon possesses in common with Eugène Rouher, and the rest will trouble it little. . . . Eugène Rougon will ever remain, for the public, Eugène Rouher.'

It has since been admitted that one or two details in the description of Eugène Rougon's character were, as a matter of fact, borrowed from the character of the Emperor's minister—his attitude in the tribune, his way of speaking and of combating the opposition, and his mania for games of patience. But, apart from these trifling details, it is thought amongst Zola's friends and those who know him intimately that Eugène Rougon is, to some extent, a picture of Zola himself, the chaste and moral man, who loves power intellectually less for the advantages which power brings with it than as a manifestation of his own strength. 'Eugène Rougon,' writes Paul Alexis, 'is, to my thinking, Emile Zola as a minister

—that is to say, the dream of what he would have been had he applied his ambition to politics.'

A propos of this last, some time ago Zola's candidature for the French Legislative Assembly was spoken of in connection with this year's elections, and 'Zola Député' formed the startling title of more than one article in the Parisian press. Zola wrote a letter to say that, although he had no present intention of offering himself as a candidate, the idea of political occupation was by no means foreign to his tastes, and that perhaps some day he might agree to assume the functions of legislator. It may be added that Zola was for years a very excellent member of the municipal or local council of Médan, the village where his country house is situated, and used with the greatest zeal and regularity to perform his duties in attending the meetings of the council and discussing matters of local interest with his long-bloused peasant colleagues; and that when, a year or two ago, he was forced to serve on a Paris jury, he acquitted himself of this civic function in a way which won him the compliments not only of his fellow-jurors but also of the court.

CHAPTER IX

BEFORE THE 'ASSOMMOIR'—ZOLA'S FRIENDS—HIS WANT OF SUCCESS

'SON EXCELLENCE EUGÈNE ROUGON' was published in 1875; it was the sixth of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series. Zola was at that time thirty-five years old. But although already at that age the author of twelve books, to say nothing of innumerable newspaper articles, the success aimed after by the ambitious Provençal seemed as far from attainment as it did when he first threw himself into the *mêlée* after leaving Hachette's, where at least his daily bread was assured. Success there was to a certain extent, it is true, but of so mediocre a kind that it was really more disheartening than downright failure. In the latter case Zola could have consoled himself with the eternal consolation of the unsuccessful artist, that his failure was due not to his want of talent but to the blindness of the public, that he was misunderstood, and that nothing better was to be expected

from a horn-eyed generation of contemporaries. As it was, his books sold sufficiently to convince him that his style had a certain number of admirers, that his stories were to a certain extent appreciated by the public; and this deprived him of the consolation of believing himself misunderstood. The harrowing question then arose: If a few admirers, why not many? If two thousand people bought each of his books as they came out, and if, accordingly, two thousand people were admirers of his, why not twenty thousand? It seemed to him that he was destined to the despairing career of the moderately successful novelist who, without being striking enough to emerge from the crowd, is just able to keep himself and his family in board and lodging by the labour of his pen. And if there was anything in the world against which Zola's soul revolted, it was against the middle way. He had been happy as a poet starving in a Latin-Quarter garret; he is happy to-day as the most popular novelist in the world; he was desperately unhappy as the fairly successful producer of literary wares. In the first case, his ambition was strong within him; in the last, it has been wonderfully realised; but in the second case, it seemed as if it was to be realised only just enough to make him regret ever having entertained it. The first volumes of the series had sold about as well as his previous novels, reaching, for the most part, a second and some

times a third edition. 'Son Excellence Eugène Rougon' sold a little better, reaching a sixth edition shortly after its publication. Besides this, as each new volume came out, a hundred or two hundred copies of the preceding volumes used to be asked for, which seemed to indicate that at least a certain number of people were taking an interest in the series as a complete work. But progress was slow, and very different from what he had hoped for and expected. It is true that Charpentier was fairly well satisfied, and that both he and the author were making a certain income out of the books, but it was not the income that either had expected. No excitement was aroused in the public over the appearance of each fresh volume. The books appeared and went off slowly and quietly to the limited extent described. To-day the publication of a Zola novel is a boulevard event looked forward to for days previously. On the mornings of publication huge piles of the yellow-backed volumes may be seen heaped up on the stalls of the booksellers, and by noon the boulevard is flecked with yellow spots as people hurry along, each holding in his hand the eagerly-purchased volume. That was what Zola had hoped for, and what was so long in coming. The papers, moreover, treated him with an indifference which bordered on contempt. It is true that at that time the public mind was greatly taken up with the political events through which

France was passing, and that, as is well known to everybody connected with the profession of letters, there is nothing more detrimental to literary success, as manifested by big sales and general interest, than an outbreak of political fever. When people are thinking about politics, they have no time to think about, nor to take interest in, anything else.

A conspiracy of silence seemed to have been arranged amongst the newspapers with reference to his books. It is true that in this case also the absorbing interest of the prolonged political crisis through which France was passing from after the war until the definite establishment of the Third Republic might very well account for the small attention that was paid in the press to literary matters. Still, Zola was treated with an indifference which, in view of even the small amount of success which he had attained, could not easily be explained except as the result of a conspiracy. Barbey d'Aurevilly, it is true, never let one of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series pass without publishing a violent attack; the 'hysterical Catholic,' as Zola called him, never being able to reconcile himself to the new school of fiction of which Emile Zola was the champion. There was also a certain Charles Bigot, literary critic to 'Le Siècle,' at that time a paper of considerable importance, who used to publish notices of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series in his paper, and who, without appearing to

comprehend the author's purport, was amiable and polite.

'But all that,' writes Alexis, 'was a very poor result, after the publication of six works, representing more than six years of very hard work and a very considerable sum of effort. . . . To be tortured with the ambition to become a field-marshal in the army of literature, and to see oneself doomed to remain a simple captain! Think of it!' Such was the state of mind of the author of the 'Rougon-Macquart.' And to think that a mere nothing was perhaps alone wanted to determine this success, which would not come in France, but which was already beginning abroad, especially in Russia.

It was in this position and in this state of discouragement—if Zola really ever was discouraged, which one has some difficulty in believing—that 'L'Assommoir' was written.

Before proceeding to the history of this remarkable and epoch-making book, it may be of interest to hear from Zola's own lips—the words being quoted from a conversation with him at the time—what he considered himself in literature, and how he qualified the particular form of literature to which he had so resolutely devoted himself.

'I am,' said Zola, 'in the matter of criticism, but an observer. I belong to Taine's school, and I compare myself to the botanist who classes in his botanical

collection the various plants that he has collected, making mention of the useful qualities or dangerous properties of each plant. It was not I who created the naturalist current, I did no more than follow it. Naturalism is not a system. Claude Bernard said: "I bring no new medicines. I have no new system. I only bring a quite new light on the old systems that have been followed up till now." I might repeat the words of this illustrious *savant*. Naturalism is the expression of the ideas which are in favour in this century: ("Le naturalisme est l'expression des idées qui traversent le siècle.") It has broken violently in upon the noisy and befeathered school of the romanticists, and it will throw the latter down. The revolution is over and done. Soon there will be a regular government, soldiers will be enlisted, and any too great impetuosity of the late rebels, that is to say of the naturalists, will be checked. As for me, I repeat it, I have discovered nothing, absolutely nothing. You will find the expression *document humain* at the end of Taine's study on Balzac, whilst the word *naturalisme* had been used before me by a good score of writers. That having been said, I come back to the confusion wilfully established, as far as I am concerned, between myself as a critic and as a producer. It is said that I do not always practise what I preach, that I am not always in harmony with my own ideas. But I am the last to contest that fact. I very well

know that in my cap are all too many of the feathers of the romantic *panache*. Is it my fault if the power of romanticism has been such that even the most resolute of its enemies—such as myself—have had the greatest difficulty in freeing themselves from its pernicious influence? I love the classic tongue—that tongue, so calm and severe, yet at the same time so sonorous and harmonious. I could wish that it should be the spoken tongue, and I should like to write in it. Am I, then, to blame if, in spite of my efforts, I do not succeed in speaking it nor in writing it? And shall that prevent me from advising all whom I can get to listen to me to cultivate it? That is to say, shall I, as a critic, cease from laying down a law which I consider useful and necessary, just because, as an author, I myself am not able to follow that law as absolutely as I would wish to do?

'As to my being the head of a school, the head of the naturalist school, a title which is constantly being pressed upon me, I may declare that I am not and do not wish to be the head of any school. That is another legend which it is necessary to explode. I am, according to the occasion, either speaker or standard-bearer. ("Je suis, selon l'occasion, porte-drapeau ou porte-voix.") I seek, in my novels, to carry firmly aloft the flag of naturalism; I try, as a critic, to defend its rights and its prerogatives. And that is all. Would you like

to know why it is that I am considered a head of a school? It is because I say out loud what others only whisper. What I write is, after all, only the faithful *résumé* of conversations which I have with my literary friends. Some of them, and amongst them the most important, keep a certain reserve, forced to do so, no doubt, by certain reasons and considerations; whilst *I* have conquered my liberty at a sufficient cost to be able to speak out plainly. But I repeat, even at the risk of being contradicted by them, that their way of thinking is absolutely identical with mine; their opinion on literary matters is the same as mine in every respect. . . . I cannot, therefore, protest sufficiently strongly against the title given to me of "head of a school." I am only the younger brother of Flaubert and of De Goncourt, just as I am the brother-in-arms of Daudet. But, as I am braver, or, to use the exact word, more frank than they are, the public, which makes no distinction between elder and younger brothers in letters, and which judges men only by what they dare to do, says: But that man is the chief, because he says out aloud what the rest are so persistently silent about.

'And the truth is,' continues M. Zola, 'that nobody invents anything. Events arise fatally, implacably, and men, either with or against their wills, are involved in them. Such is the absolute law of human progress. Who, for instance, would dare to

deny that romanticism existed before Hugo, and above all round and about Hugo? Romanticism? But, indeed, you can find it in Chateaubriand—and even in Rousseau. You will notice its presence, above all, amongst those who surrounded Victor Hugo. Howsoever, Hugo, with the enormous power of his genius, was able to absorb all that he found around and in contact with himself. Thus, I could quote phrases of his which are copied word for word from Michelet. To resume, I cannot do better than compare him to a sponge, which, by its absorbent properties, sucks up, to its profit, all that is near it, and, thanks to this, swells out to an enormous size. The misfortune about Hugo is, that he is old and that he no longer possesses the virility of his earlier days. Oh, but for that you would see him amongst us naturalists, and certainly at the head of us all. He would understand that it is we who are in the right. It is even probable that he would absorb us as formerly he absorbed De Vigny, Gautier, De Nerval, and the rest. But he would fight in our ranks. And that is so true that he already shows certain signs of desiring to sacrifice to the naturalist school. But those who surround him are implacable, and he himself has no longer the power that distinguished him in his youth. And please observe that I used to be a fanatical admirer of Victor Hugo, and that in spite of all I remain one of his most sincere admirers.'

M. Zola was then asked whether he did not fear that the future of naturalism might be compromised by monstrous and systematic exaggerations of expression, and Huysmans was quoted. It was pointed out that the public, disgusted with these exaggerations, might undergo a reaction, and turn back to the sickly sweetnesses of Delille, for instance.

'I am very frank,' answered Zola, 'especially towards my friends. As to Huysmans, of whom I am very fond, when he brought me his book, "Les Sœurs Vatard," I did not disguise to him my opinion that the excessive colour of his style displeased me. I went so far as to add, that the work-girls about whom he wrote had nothing whatever to do with the people, and were only connected with the people by an imperceptible thread. As a matter of fact, I admit that they constitute the bookbinding workshop that Mr. Huysmans directs, and nothing more. It is true that Huysmans would be the first to admit that all that he wanted to do in "Les Sœurs Vatard" was to paint but a small corner in the life of the people. In the same way, the De Goncourts never paint *tableaux d'ensemble*. And repeating that I have no disciples, I will point out to you that Huysmans by no means proceeds from me. If he proceed from anybody, it is from the Goncourts.

'And to resume. I want to shout out from the housetops that I am not a *chef d'école*, and that I

don't want any disciples. I am pursuing the object I have told you of, and I feel that if I am not encouraged by the press, I have at least the sympathies of the public with me; and that suffices me.'

Zola has repeatedly since denied any claim to be the head of a literary school, notably on the occasion of his decoration as a Knight of the Legion of Honour, when his self-styled school published in the papers a formal disapproval of his acceptance of a distinction which they said was beneath the notice of a literary man. He has always maintained that the men who surround him are but his more or less intimate friends, disciples never; and as to the men who signed the protestation above referred to, he dismissed them contemptuously with the remark: 'They formed my tail, without my desiring to possess a tail. That tail has now dropped off from my person. That is all about it.'

As to the group of friends who surrounded him at the time of the 'Assommoir,' most of whom have still remained his intimates, Alexis relates how this group came to be formed. Referring first to the way in which he himself, in 1869, made Zola's acquaintance, he continues: 'Seven years later, in 1876, one day Henri Céard came and rang at the door of the house in the rue St. Georges. It was a Sunday. Not having to go to the Government office at which he was employed that day, the idea had

come to him to go and introduce himself personally to the author of the 'Rougon-Macquart' novels, and to say simply: "I have read all your books, and, as I admire them very much, I have come to see you." Zola, who was but little accustomed to visits of this description, received his visitor with a certain amount of embarrassment; but an hour or two later, being with Flaubert—Sunday being Flaubert's reception-day—he told him of the visit he had received. Flaubert was greatly touched, and exclaimed, "That was very nice; it is the sort of thing that always gives one great pleasure."

'Some Sundays later, Henri Céard returned to the rue St. Georges, bringing his friend Huysmans with him. Huysmans brought his book "Marthe," which had recently been published in Belgium, with him. The two had discovered Zola together, after reading his "Ventre de Paris."'

Henri Céard, it may be mentioned here, has always remained the intimate friend of Zola, and, indeed, to a considerable extent has been able to assist him in his work in procuring information for him on many subjects. He is to-day sub-librarian at the Carnavalet Museum in Paris, and was recently created a Knight of the Legion of Honour—a distinction which aroused the ire of Scholl and of others in the Paris press, who attacked him bitterly and most unjustly. Céard is a very distinguished scholar,

and a man of refined literary taste. He has not written very much, but the pieces that we possess from his pen are distinguished by a great delicacy of style. He is a *habitué* of Daudet's house, and is highly appreciated by the author of 'Sappho,' about whose wife he has published a very remarkable essay. He possesses innumerable documents about Emile Zola, and could on a future occasion play the Boswell to his Johnson, were he so inclined. He has also a perfect collection of all the innumerable caricatures of Zola that have ever appeared.

'I, on my side,' continues Alexis, 'had made acquaintance with Léon Hennique. I used to meet him in the afternoons at the office of the "République des Lettres," a review edited by Catulle Mendès. After he had given a lecture at the lecture-hall on the boulevard des Capucines upon Zola and his work, I took him to the rue St. Georges, and introduced him. I had made Huysmans' acquaintance through Mendès also, and after an exchange of volumes—he sending me his book "Marthe," and I my "Fin de Lucie Pellegrin"—I was invited to dine at his house. Hennique was there, and so was Henri Céard, whom I had not yet met. It was I also who introduced Guy de Maupassant to my three new friends, having made Maupassant's acquaintance at Flaubert's house. Then we were five. Our little group was thus con-

stituted. One fine Thursday afternoon we set out in a solid phalanx for Zola's house. Since then we have gone there every Thursday evening.

'And now I ought to say a word about our real attitude towards Zola. I am forced to do this in order to do away with the absurd stories that are current. I have before my eyes some of the amiable articles which certain of our *confrères* on the Paris press have been good enough to consecrate to us. Here are some specimens of their kind remarks about us—"presumptuous youths," "literary outcasts," "feeble imitators," "impotent valets," "dusters of the master's glory," "beneath all contempt," &c. According to these kind friends we are needy beggars, and are kept by Zola. The truth is that our relations with Zola, far from being those of pupils with a master, differ in no respect, in point of intimacy and of affectionate comradeship, from those existing amongst us five. On the contrary, each of us, I think, is more at his ease with Zola than with any of the others. We are simply Zola's friends, and no more.'

CHAPTER X

'L'ASSOMMOIR'—ZOLA AS A JOURNALIST

It was at Saint-Aubin-on-the-Sea that Zola evolved the plan and story of the book 'L'Assommoir,' which was to make his fame and his fortune. Already, on leaving Paris in the early part of that summer, he had made up his mind that his next book should be a study of the people of the Paris faubourgs, an idea which he had long entertained and had ardently desired to put into execution. He knew the people of Paris well. When quite a child, during a visit to Paris, he had spent several weeks with a relation who was a workman himself, and who inhabited one of those immense tenement houses in a poor quarter which he desired to describe. Later on, when starving in Paris, many months had been spent in the poor quarters of the rue de la Pépinière, at Montrouge, in the rue Saint-Jacques, and in the boulevard Montparnasse. He remembered being present at domestic events of 'wonderful colour'—a death and a funeral in a workman's family, a workman's *fête*, workmen's

festivities. He had experienced poverty himself; the horror of hunger and cold he could describe with a full knowledge of what he was writing about—the struggle for the day's bread. He had at his finger-ends the squalid *menus* of the poor. Had he not himself lived for weeks much as poor Gervaise lived in the days which preceded her final fall into the gutter? That he could fully sympathise with the very real miseries of privation will be all the more evident when it is stated that Zola's one vice, as admitted by himself, is a certain fondness for the good things of the table. He is a *gourmet*. When he began to make money, it was mostly spent on *primeurs* for himself and his wife. His table to-day is one of the best in Paris, and, usually morose and sad-looking, his face lights up as he sits down to a dinner the *menu* of which is always very carefully elaborated. There was some bitterness of recollection in that cry of his which can be found in the chapter of 'L'Assommoir' alluded to, where the starvation of Gervaise is detailed: 'Ah, la crevaison des pauvres, les entrailles vides qui crient la faim, le besoin des bêtes claquant des dents et s'empiffrant de choses immondes, dans ce grand Paris si doré et si flambant!' He had had experience of these *choses immondes*, and could fully feel for poor Gervaise, being, like her, very fond of what is good in eating and drinking.

His mind was made up to make use of all these souvenirs of his: his book should be a complete monograph of the life of the people. It was decided that it should describe, amongst other things, a typical workman's wedding and a workman's funeral. It should put on the stage all the varieties of workmen—the industrious workman, the lazy drunkard, the honest man, and the low scoundrel who lives on women's shame.

He had brought with him to Saint-Aubin a large collection of notes, having visited, before his departure from Paris, a smithy, the workshop of a gold-chain maker—romanticism probably prompting him in this last choice—and a laundry. He had carefully studied up Delvau's Slang Dictionary, his original intention being to write the book almost entirely in the *argot* used by the faubourg people. It was, indeed, in Delvau's 'Dictionnaire de la Langue Verte' that he found the title of his book 'L'Assommoir,' that wonderfully expressive term for the crushing, killing effect of the cheap drinking-shop. Nothing, however, was further from his intentions than to write a book against intemperance. Zola has never written books with a purpose. If the title of the book was 'L'Assommoir,' it was because the drinking-shop is the place where, as a matter of necessity, workmen meet together, and it thus constituted the natural stage for a story in

which various types of workmen were to be described. But what was still wanting during the first days of his stay at Saint-Aubin, and from the lack of which he was unable to set to work, was the plot of the story.

'What I want,' he said one afternoon, as he was sitting with a friend on the beach at Saint-Aubin, 'is something very simple.'

Facing him was the sea, sparkling under the sun. The sky above was a deep blue, and as no clouds thickened the atmosphere, the line of horizon was as sharply and clearly defined as though drawn with a compass.

Pointing to this line suddenly, he said: 'What I want to find is something like that—something, I am certain, quite simple—a well-drawn line, quite straight. The effect would be grandiose, no doubt.'

Then he added, that he should probably content himself with the simple story of the life of a woman of the people, who, after having had two children by a lover, marries, later on, another man, and at first behaves well towards her husband, working bravely, and succeeding in setting up in business as a washerwoman. Then the husband would become a drunkard, and she, in consequence, would gradually go down hill to disorder and wretchedness. But there was still something wanting, and it was only when he had hit upon the idea of bringing the

lover—Lantier—back into the family, that he could cry out, as he did one afternoon on the beach at Saint-Aubin, 'Eureka!' and that he could say that the 'Assommoir' was already done.

The plot having been decided upon, Zola drew up the plan of the book with the same care and precision that had always characterised his preliminary labour on his novels. And here may be the place to quote what he himself said to Signor Edmondo de Amicis, who visited him in Paris some time after the publication of 'L'Assommoir,' as to his way of writing a novel.

'This is how I do it,' he said. 'Indeed, as a matter of fact, I can hardly be said to "do it"—rather, it does itself. I can't invent facts, lacking absolutely that faculty of imagination. If I sit down to my table to think out the plot of a story, I remain sitting for three days together with my head in my hand, racking my brains, and finding nothing. As a consequence, I have had to give up troubling myself about the subject of my stories. I begin to work on my novel without knowing what events will be described in the course of it, nor what characters will take part in the action, nor what the end and the beginning will be. I know only my principal character—my Rougon or my Macquart, male or female, always an old acquaintance. I occupy myself with him alone, I reflect on his

character, I think of the family in which he was born, on his first impressions, and on the class in which I have decided to place his life. That is my most important occupation—to study the people with whom my principal character will have to do, the places which he will have to inhabit, the air which he will have to breathe, his profession, his habits, down to the most trivial occupations with which he will fill up his spare moments.

'After spending two or three months in this study, I am master of this particular kind of life, I see it, I feel it, I live in it in imagination, and I am certain of being able to give my novel the special colour and perfume of that class of people. Besides, by living some time as I have done amongst this class of people, I have made the acquaintance of individuals belonging to it, I have heard real facts related, I know what occurs there as a general rule, I have learned the language which they usually talk, I have in my head a quantity of types, of scenes, of fragments of dialogue, of episodes, of occurrences, which form a confused story made up of a thousand unconnected fragments. Then there remains to be done what for me is the most difficult task of all, to attach to a single thread, as best I am able, all these reminiscences and scattered impressions. It is almost always a lengthy task. But I set to work upon it phlegmatically, and instead of using my imagination

I use my reasoning faculties. I argue to myself, I write my monologues word for word, just as they occur to me, so that, read by another, they would appear strange. So-and-so does this or that. What would be the natural result of such-and-such an act? Would such an act affect my personage? Certainly. It is therefore logical that this other person should react in such-and-such a manner. Then some other character may intervene there, such a one, for instance, whose acquaintance I made at such a place on such an evening. I research the immediate consequences of even the smallest event, that which would logically be its natural result, the character and the position of my personages being taken into consideration; I work as does a commissary of police who desires to discover the authors of some mysterious crime from some very slight clue. Often, however, very great difficulties stand in my way. Sometimes there are only two more threads to be knotted together, the most simple of consequences to be deduced, and I cannot manage to do it. I tire myself out and worry myself uselessly. Then I give up thinking about it, because I know that I am wasting my time. Two, three, or four days go by. One fine morning, in the end, whilst I am at breakfast and am thinking of something quite different, suddenly my two threads knot themselves together, the deduction is found, and all my difficulties are overcome. Then

a flood of light is poured over the whole of my novel. I see it all, and all is finished. I become once more sure of myself. I know that I shall succeed, and there remains for me nothing more but what I consider the most agreeable part of my work. And I set to work upon it quietly, methodically, with my watch in my hand. I write a little every day, three pages of print, not a line more, and I only work in the morning. I write almost without having to make any corrections, because for months I have been thinking it all over, and as soon as I have written them I put the pages aside and do not see them again until they are in print. I can calculate infallibly the date when my book will be finished.'

This statement was made by Zola to M. de Amicis more than ten years ago. A comparison of it with a similar statement made to the writer of this book, which will be found in another chapter, will establish the fact that Zola's method has differed but little since the day of his first great success. The only change that he made in his habits after his position had brilliantly changed for the better, was to give up his afternoon work, which had consisted in journalistic work, and which had only been done for the sake of the income that it produced. Zola has always been a prudent man, and even when he was already making a very good income out of his books, even for some time after the publication and astound-

ing success of the 'Assommoir,' he continued tasks which were little better than hackwork, but which assured him a certain fixed revenue. At the same time Zola has always expressed himself a keen admirer of journalism and of the work of the journalist.

'I consider that journalism,' he has said, 'unless as a political instrument, can only be a transitory stage for the man of letters, his apprenticeship as it were. I speak from experience, I who have done every kind of journalistic work, from a vulgar police case report up to a political leader. The immense advantage of journalism is the great power that it bestows upon the writer. The whole social question can be formulated by the veriest journalistic tyro in the simplest *fait-divers*. Besides, can the literary education, the habit of writing which is obtained by journalism, be held of no account? Doubtless one must have strong loins; this steam-machine labour must kill the feeble, but the strong cannot but profit by it. And, to speak plainly, it is the strong only who interest me. I have no pity whatever for the fate of those who are vanquished, when their weakness is the cause of their defeat. Character is wanted in life, and without energy one can attain nothing. Journalism, moreover, provides the man of letters of to-day with his daily bread, and thus ensures his independence. I should like to say all that I think on this subject. I shall certainly do so some

day, because a vital question is there. The writers of the last century were lackeys because they earned no money, and it is to this battle of the contemporary writer, which all of us have engaged in, against the necessities of life, that we owe Balzac.

'I have worked much as a journalist, though I have frequented newspaper offices but little. When I was still poor, when my books did not sell, I did journalistic work in order to earn money. I do it to-day to defend my ideas and to proclaim my principles. I have worked in succession on "La Situation," on the "Petit Journal," on the Lyons "Salut Public," on the "Avenir National," on the "Cloche," for which I acted as parliamentary reporter, on the "Corsaire," which was suppressed, owing to a spiteful article of mine entitled "The Morrow of the Crisis," on the "Tribune," &c. I was struck by a peculiarity in the "Tribune" staff, which was that everybody connected with the paper was a candidate for a seat in Parliament. Only the office-boy and myself were not. In 1866 I was attached to the "Figaro," my salary being 240*l.* a year, but I was paid besides for my articles, and certain other work. So that, during the year 1867, counting my novel and my articles on the Salon, I realised from the "Figaro" at least 400*l.* I remember that year as one of the happiest of my life. I cannot think of it without feeling touched. For the first time my work

enabled me to go and see the fields and the woods, the green fields and the blossoming trees, the beautiful nature of which I am so fond. In 1870, at the time of the siege, I was at Marseilles. Madame Zola's health had forced me to go South. There again it was journalism that saved me. I knew a good fellow called Léopold Arnault, who at that time was director of the "Messager de Provence." It was in his paper that one of my youthful productions, the "Mystères de Marseille," had been published. Arnault asked me to write in the "Messager de Provence." The offer was not a tempting one. I told him so very clearly, and proposed to him to found a new paper. He accepted, and we brought out the "Marseillaise —the Marseilles "Marseillaise"—which survived until I left for Bordeaux. The "Marseillaise" was an Opposition paper of advanced opinions. Our politics were at least of the Gambetta shade, of the Gambetta of the day. The "Marseillaise" printed from fifteen to twenty thousand copies and sold them. During my stay at Marseilles I entered into relations with the "Sémaphore." I was correspondent of this paper in Paris until 1877. The "Assommoir" was selling well, and had been selling for over seven months, and still by measure of precaution I continued sending my daily letter. All that for a few hundred francs a month.'

It was Tourguéneff who procured him his position

on the 'Messager de l'Europe,' a review published in Russian at St. Petersburg, and to which he contributed a series of articles on literary subjects which, translated into Russian, made a great stir. It was in 1875, just after the suppression of the 'Corsaire,' owing to an article of his, had made him feared as a contributor by the French papers, that the Russian novelist, with whom Zola had been long on very friendly terms, said to him: 'Since people won't hear of you in France, let me find you a monthly letter to do for a Russian publication.' Zola accepted, and for five years sent a letter each month to the 'Messager.' Many of his letters were lengthy critical literary studies, but sometimes he sent a story or a general article or *chronique*. The article which attracted most attention was the one entitled 'Les Romanciers Contemporains,' written in all good faith and without the least presentiment of the storm that it would bring down on his head. His salary as correspondent of the 'Messager' was 800 francs a month, and the various articles contributed to it during his five years' connection with this review, were afterwards republished in book form under the titles of 'Le Roman Expérimental,' containing the article which was so entitled, the 'Lettre à la Jeunesse,' 'Le Naturalisme au Théâtre,' 'L'Argent dans la Littérature,' and 'La République et la Littérature.' (2) 'Les Romanciers Naturalistes,' containing five

literary portraits—Balzac, Stendhal, Gustave Flaubert, Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, and Alphonse Daudet, together with the famous article on contemporary novelists which had caused such a scandal. (3) 'Documents Littéraires,' which contained the further literary portraits of Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Musset, Théophile Gautier, Les Poètes Contemporains, George Sand, Dumas fils, Sainte-Beuve, and two essays, entitled 'Le Critique Contemporaine' and 'De la Moralité dans la Littérature.'

The short stories contributed to the 'Messager' would form two other volumes.

He contributed also as dramatic critic to a paper called 'Le Bien Public,' his salary being 240*l.* a year. His two volumes, 'Le Naturalisme au Théâtre' and 'Nos Auteurs Dramatiques,' contain the articles which he wrote in the 'Bien Public' and in the 'Voltaire.'

Speaking about his collaboration on the 'Bien Public,' Zola said: 'The principal object I had in view was the 6,000 francs a year which my dramatic *feuilleton* there brought in. Later on, when my circumstances improved, when I felt I was becoming a power, the money question became only a secondary consideration, and I used my *feuilleton* as a tribune.

'So you see,' he added, 'journalism is at once a means and an end. It is moreover a terrible weapon. How many *littérateurs*, including the most estimable,

would be glad to be able to make use of it, and to derive therefrom certain subsidies! Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that journalism is a treadmill. Do not the Parisian journalists proclaim the fact from the housetops, thus bringing discredit on their profession. To cite only one example: at the time that I was writing 'Nana' I happened to be at a lady's house, where I had dined in company with certain journalists, including Sarcey and Chapron. After dinner Chapron began to talk about journalism, or rather to speak against it. His remarks were a series of explosions of abuse against the profession. "What a dirty trade!" "Fancy calling journalism a career!" "It is a shame and a disgrace," and so on, and so on. At last he irritated me so, that I could not help exclaiming, "But, my dear sir, why do you then work as a journalist? There are so many other honourable and honoured professions. Who prevents you from leaving the Press if you find it so detestable?" And that is why, be it said *en passant*, that Chapron to-day attacks me so ferociously in his paper, the "Evénement."'

In the course of the same conversation Zola spoke about criticism in France. He denied its existence. 'I might add,' he said, 'that there never has been any real criticism in France. All our critics have friendships to preserve, certain interests to consider. And, besides, a critic's *métier* is a break-

neck job. If you speak frankly, in a few days you have nothing but enemies. So I consider that old men having too many social relations should never act as critics, but that criticism should be written by the young, who are not embarrassed with too many connections. It would temper them, fortify them. It would be for them, in some sort, a literary baptism of fire. And what I say to you there, I have already said to one of the young men that I am thinking of —a young man of great value, Paul Bourget, who, I am sorry to see, is entering the Richepin clan.'

It was at this time that Zola had had some idea of founding a journal of his own in which to defend and to propagate his ideas. A capitalist had offered him the necessary capital and the paper very nearly came into existence. But he found that his novels took up his time too completely to allow him to assume other tasks, and the scheme was dropped, though he sometimes reverts to it. His idea was to found a paper on the lines of the old 'Figaro,' and at the same time to deal, as occasion presented itself, with political questions. He would treat men and events very loftily. He would speak frankly without any personal consideration whatsoever. He believed that such a paper would succeed, and that in any case it would be a curious document for the future.

Whilst working as a journalist, Zola never for a single day, even when earning a good income by his

contributions, lost sight of the real object he had in view—indeed, the only object of his life. Considering that the morning was the time when the best work could be done (and be it noted here that as long as he worked from imagination it was at nights that he wrote, and that when he began to work from documentation, observation, and with logic he abandoned night-work), he invariably devoted his best and first energies to his novels, attending to his journalistic duties in the afternoons. Now that his books produce so splendid an income he has almost entirely abandoned journalism, though now and again an article signed by him appears in the papers —usually in the 'Figaro'—which he styles 'his paper.' His opinions on passing events are usually communicated to the public by means of interviews. Zola is the most interviewed of any public man in France, readily responding to any request for such a conversation. He declares that he attaches no importance whatever to the reports published of his expressions of opinion so obtained, and declines all responsibility in connection with them. Doubtless his readiness to allow himself to be interviewed is to a great extent due to a desire to oblige his *confrères*, whilst at the same time the commercial value of constant publicity is by no means lost sight of. Zola is a keen business man, and fully appreciates the advantage of having his name constantly before the

public. In a conversation which I had with him only a few days ago he expressed himself very vigorously on his practice of considering the polity of his acts and of looking first to the commercial advantage that they might confer. He asked me to allow him to speak with 'brutal egotism.' It is a trait of character worth noting. It may also be noted that, in his relations towards the journalists who come to interview him, if he is obliging and polite, he always holds himself on a strict personal reserve, treating the matter from beginning to end as a purely business matter. A man might interview Emile Zola fifty times and yet be no nearer to his friendship than he was before he first met him. This coldness and reserve have been complained about, and only recently an article appeared in a Parisian paper in which it was commented upon. Amongst other statements was made the one that Zola never 'offers anything'—presumably in the way of refreshment—to his interviewing visitors. This is the case, and I believe that Zola himself has said that it is a principle of his not to do so, not from temperance motives, certainly, but because he does not wish a purely business matter to be transformed into a friendly intercourse. Besides, were he to entertain all the men who call upon him on one pretext or another, the cellars at Médan and at the rue de Bruxelles would very soon be depleted.

CHAPTER XI

THE 'ASSOMMOIR'

THE drawer containing Zola's preparatory work on the 'Assommoir' is one of great interest. De Amicis relates that during his visit to Zola he was shown the 'Assommoir' *dossier*, and writes :—

'On the first pages there was a sketch of the various characters, with notes on their personal appearance, on their temperament, and on their character. I found there the plans of the characters of Gervaise, of Coupeau, of Mother Coupeau, of the Lorilleuxes, of the Boches, of Goujet, of Madame Lerat—all were there. One would have thought them notes of a police register, written laconically, but in plain language, and interspersed with brief reasonings like, "Born thus, and educated thus, he would act thus." In one place I read the remark, "And how could a scoundrel like this act otherwise?" I remember, amongst others, a sketch of Lantier, which was a list of adjectives forming an ascending scale of abuse, "coarse, sensual, brutal, egotist,

filthy-minded." Here and there one could read the remark, "Make use of So-and-so," referring to some person with whom the author was acquainted. It was all written with order in a large and clear hand. Next I was shown sketches of the various scenes—sketches done with the pen with the careful exactness of an engineer's designs. There was a quantity of them; the whole "Assommoir" was sketched out—the streets of the quarter in which the action of the story takes place, which with the street-corners and the sites of the various shops marked out the zigzags of Gervaise to avoid her creditors, Nana's Sunday truanting excursions, the peregrinations of the band of drinkers from *bastringue* to *bastringue* and from *bousingot* to *bousingot*, the hospital and the butcher's shop between which Gervaise walked to and fro on the night when starvation had driven her into the street. Marescot's big tenement house was sketched out in detail—all the top story, the landings, the windows, the cave of the undertaker's man, the hole in which Father Bru lived, all those gloomy passages where one felt the "breath of starvation, the walls which resounded like empty stomachs, the doors through which ever came the sound of blows and the whining of starving children." There was also a plan of Gervaise's shop, room for room, with the places of the beds and tables marked out, with corrections here and there. It could be seen that Zola had amused himself over it for many

hours, forgetting perhaps all about his novel, and plunged in his fiction as in a personal souvenir. On other sheets there were notes of a different character. I noticed two in particular, "twenty pages of description of such-and-such a scene," "twelve pages of description of such a scene, to be divided into three parts." This way of working as with a compass, even in works of imagination, is less rare than one might think. Zola is a great mechanician. One sees how his descriptions proceed symmetrically, in passages often separated by other matter, put there to enable the reader to take breath, and divided into almost equal parts, as that of the flowers in the park in the "Faute de l'Abbé Mouret," that of the storm in "Une Page d'Amour" that of the death of Coupeau in the "Assommoir." One would say that in order to be able to work quietly and without worry he must first of all trace out the precise limits of his task, know exactly where he can rest himself, and what length and what form his work will assume in the printer's hands. When he has too much matter he cuts it down to adjust it to these limits, and when he has too little he tries to spin it out to the length decided upon. He has an unconquerable love for proportion, which may sometimes, it is true, engender prolixity, but which often, by forcing the mind to dwell on the subject, renders the work more profound and more complete.'

The writing of 'L'Assommoir,' prepared as has

been related, took Zola much longer than any of his previous works. It was only after he had written the first two chapters that the idea came to him to make use of slang—not the slang of thieves and their associates, but the popular language of the faubourgs. It will be remembered that in 'L'Assommoir,' wherever the author speaks himself it is in the same language as his characters—an apparent *laisser-aller* of style, but in reality an excellent and subtle artistic device. Alexis describes this as 'a new process of the modern novel, where the writer effaces himself as much as possible so as not to stand between the intensity of the drama and the immediate emotion of the reader.'

It was, according to Alexis, to the entire novelty of the form that was in a very large measure due the phenomenal and almost immediate success of this book. Personally I should rather attribute this success, which may be considered most completely merited, due as much to the intense pathos of the simple drama which the story relates, to the keen analysis of human nature, and to the real humour that is displayed in almost every page of the book.

And, *à propos* of Zola's humour, I remember once asking him whether never, in writing 'L'Assommoir,' or in re-reading it, a smile had come to his lips, for authors, it is well known, are the first to enjoy and perhaps take keenest enjoyment in their own jokes.

Now 'L'Assommoir' is full of wit, not of the modern humourism perhaps, but of that dry, cynical, Byronesque *crû* which is especially grateful to the English reader. What, for instance, could be more mirth-provoking than the reflections of the Boches, for those who know the Parisian *concierge*; or the meannesses of the Lorilleux, who hung a blanket before their door every time that they ate a rabbit stew, lest the smell of the dish should betray their comparative affluence to their starving neighbours? Zola answered that, no, he never felt funny and never laughed at what he wrote, feeling nervous and irritated all the while that he was at work, and that as to re-reading his books, it was a thing he never did, glad to forget them as soon as they had been disposed of. It was on the same occasion that he told me that every morning on sitting down to his table he felt as if the whole of his task were still before him; that so far he had done nothing, that he was still a mere *débutant*.

The 'Assommoir' first appeared in *feuilleton* form in a democratic journal entitled 'Le Bien Public,' to which Zola had contributed previously certain remarkable articles of dramatic criticism. Zola had sold the serial rights of his new story to the editor of this paper for four hundred pounds. The editor seems to have hoped, in commissioning his dramatic critic to write a serial about the people, or rather in

offering to publish for the sum mentioned the story about the people that he knew his dramatic critic to be writing, to publish a work which would please the people of the faubourgs and help to increase the circulation of his paper, which appealed especially to the democratic classes. It was not long before the editor found out his mistake. Far from tickling the faubourg, the crude verities of the tale excited the fury of the Republicans, who saw in them a direct insult to the people, to flatter whom was their mission and their bread-winning. Not only did the 'Assommoir' not increase the sale of the paper to any noticeable extent, but, on the contrary, many of the small number of subscribers were indignant and refused to continue their subscriptions if the 'people' was to be insulted in their paper. That was indeed the first reproach addressed to Zola about his new novel—namely, that it was a malicious and gross calumny of the people. The excellent subscribers to the 'Bien Public' declared that they could not stand by carelessly whilst the 'workman' was being insulted. Hundreds of letters poured in daily into the office of the newspaper, many containing personal menaces against both editor and contributor. Zola still possesses and can show letters written to him by anonymous correspondents at the time, in which he is threatened that some night at some street corner 'his hash would be settled for him.' The filthiest

insults were likewise sent by letter; offensive parcels were delivered at his address. The editor found it at last necessary to suspend the publication of this serial, which threatened to ruin his paper, whilst at the same time he had the fairness and probity to pay Zola the whole of the sum agreed upon, though only half of the story had been published.

Thereupon M. Catulle Mendès, who, as a Parnassian, was one of Zola's bitterest enemies in the matter of literature and art, but who had recognised the value of the work thus jeopardised, called upon Zola and asked him to allow him to publish in the review that he was editing at that time, 'La République des Lettres,' the rest of the novel which the Republican 'Bien Public' was too timid to print. All that he could offer for this right was the sum of forty pounds, which Zola accepted. It was an act of good business on Mendès' part, for public curiosity had been excited and the 'République des Lettres' was largely bought, read, written, and talked about. Long before the 'Assommoir' was published in book form it had been largely discussed in all literary and artistic circles in Paris. There were Assommoirites and Anti-Assommoirites, and everything tended to show that at last the ice of public indifference towards Zola's literary work had been broken through. Alexis remembers Tony Revillon,

a leading critic, saying to him, before the story appeared as a volume: 'Tell Zola to be quiet. His book will sell like hot cakes. "L'Assommoir" will be an extraordinary success.'

Zola himself was by no means so confident. It is true that he was, as he is still, a man of a somewhat melancholy and morose temperament, and was prepared for the worst. Still he thought that this book, on which so much labour had been spent, might possibly exceed in point of success its predecessors in the 'Rougon-Macquart' series, and used to say that his highest ambition would be realised if the book reached a tenth edition. It may be noted that the one hundred and twenty-seventh edition is now on sale. In 1880 it had already reached eighty-one editions.

It may be of interest to re-read, in connection with the history of Zola's first great success, what he himself thought and wrote about this book:—

'The "Rougon-Macquart" series,' he wrote in his preface to the 'Assommoir,' in 1877, 'will be composed of twenty novels. Since 1869 the plan has been decided upon, and is followed by me with an extreme rigour. The "Assommoir" came in its place and at its hour. I wrote it, as I shall write the others, without budging for an instant from my straight line. My strength lies there. I have an object in view and I work towards it. When the "Assommoir" appeared in a newspaper it was

attacked with an unparalleled brutality. It was denounced, accused of every crime. Is it really necessary for me to explain here, in a few words, what were my intentions as a writer? I wanted to depict the fatal *déchéance* of a family of workpeople in the pestiferous surroundings of the faubourgs. After drunkenness and laziness comes a breaking-up of family ties, the filthiness of promiscuity, the gradual forgetting of all honest feelings, then, as *dénouement*, shame and death. It is moral in action, simply.

'"L'Assommoir" is, without any doubt, the most chaste of my books. Often have I been forced to touch sores far worse. The form alone has frightened people. One got angry with words. My crime is to have had the literary curiosity to collect and to cast in a very elaborate mould the language of the people. Ah, form, there is the great crime! Dictionaries of this language, however, exist; lettered men study and delight in its freshness, in the *imprévu* and the vigour of its similes. It is a treat for grammarians fond of research. No matter; nobody even thought that it was my desire to do a purely philological piece of work, which I believe to be of strong historical and social interest. Nor do I defend myself. My work will defend me. It is a true book—the first novel about the people which has the true scent of the people. And one must by

no means conclude that the whole of the people is bad, for my characters are not bad people. They are only ignorant and spoiled by the surroundings of hard necessity and heavy toil in which they live. It is necessary, however, to read my books to understand them, to see their *ensemble* clearly before passing ready-made judgments, grotesque and odious, such as are current as to my person and my books. Oh, if people only knew how my friends are amused at the stupefying story about me with which the public is entertained! If one knew to what a degree the drinker of blood, the ferocious novelist, is a worthy *bourgeois*, a man of study and of artistic tastes, living quietly and soberly in his little corner, and whose only ambition is to leave as great and as vital a work as possible! I deny no story about me. I work, and I trust to time and to the good faith of the public to at last find me out under the heap of nonsense with which I have been covered.'

Zola's description of himself as a man leading the life of a worthy *bourgeois* is an absolutely true and correct one, and it is regrettable that the people who in England criticise this 'filthy-minded Frenchman' (I quote from a newspaper published in Dundee only a day or two ago), and who imply, as they believe, that because Zola has had to write about immorality that he must necessarily be immoral himself,

have not first made themselves acquainted with the true circumstances. It would be difficult to find a more moral man in the whole of France than Emile Zola. As soon as ever he was able to afford it he married, and lived quietly with his wife and mother. Nobody ever heard the breath of a story about or against his conduct as a husband. In Paris that sort of thing is differently considered from what it is in England, which is only all the more to Zola's credit, because his conduct is quite exceptional. Yet often, when friends, chaffing him, have asked him whether he has not in town some *petite amie*, he has always answered with the greatest seriousness, and not without surprise, 'Another woman! But I am married. I live happily with my wife. Why should I run after anybody else?' If Zola be filthy-minded, he is, at least, most certainly clean-lived—exceptionally clean-lived—a fact which gives him all the more right to sit in judgment on the rotten immoralities of the present age.

It is quite amusing to hear him talk of the women who write to him, many offering him their hearts. I remember one such conversation shortly after he had written 'Nana,' which provoked a flood of letters from feminine admirers. It was down at Médan, and we found Zola that afternoon in his favourite position, stretched out on the sofa in his workroom, with slippered feet, looking the picture

of a good Paterfamilias. There was a heap of letters by his side, and, referring to them, 'Why can't they leave me alone?' he said. 'I am happy with my wife. What more do I want?' It was on the same occasion that he expressed himself very strongly indeed on the people who affected to be disgusted with 'Nana,' and said some words which cannot be reproduced, but which summed up the position very exactly. He was rather piqued, by the way, that day, and spoke as if at bay, but with firm confidence in himself. 'What do I care about what these people say?' he asked. 'I am pretty snug here, am I not? To-morrow I shall pay off the last five hundred due on my house, and it will be my entire property. One is pretty comfortable here, I think. I make money, and I am all right.' The words 'Je m'en fiche,' which are about equivalent to 'I don't care a snap,' frequently recurred during that conversation. It seemed that Zola was irritated at being flooded with letters which were all more or less invitations to conjugal infidelity from a public which, whilst buying 'Nana' by the thousands of copies, professed to be horrified with its immorality, and publicly denounced its author as perforce a profligate.

CHAPTER XII

'UNE PAGE D'AMOUR'—'NANA'

In writing the 'Rougon-Macquart' series Zola has always endeavoured to vary his effects, to oppose to one volume of violent action and strong passion a quiet work the writing of which should in some degree repose him from the violent effort of the preceding volume, and produce, as a natural consequence, the same effect on his reader.

Having finished 'L'Assommoir' with the gigantic success which has been recorded, and before setting to work on the continuation, in the history of 'Nana,' of that work, he determined to write a book much more sober in colour, which, coming between the two high-strung books, of which one was written and the other was planned out, would vary his effect to the advantage of the series. It was with this in view that 'Une Page d'Amour' was written—a work of minute analysis, the execution of a project long fondled, to study physiologically, as well as psychologically, the various phases of a woman's passion.

'To do that in a sober study, with only two or three characters, of pure analysis, would be superb,' was what he had often been heard to say, and what he now meant to achieve, blending with the main purpose of the novel another idea which he had long caressed—namely, to make Paris seen from a height act as a mute witness of the intimate drama that he proposed to describe, to show Paris varying with the spiritual phases of his characters.

The architecture of this book is most curious. It will be remembered that it is divided into five exact parts of five chapters each, and that each fifth chapter is a fresh description of Paris. 'It has the symmetry of a chessboard,' he would say about it.

Little preparatory study was necessary for this work: and, after filling his note-books with descriptions of Paris, taken at various times of the day from the Trocadéro, in the neighbourhood of which the action of his book develops itself, and having visited, note-book in hand, a children's ball, so as to be able to give the realistic description of such a *fête* which appears in the book, he was able to take himself away with his wife to a quiet little village called Estaque, on the coast of the Mediterranean, not far from Marseilles, and to begin the writing of his new novel.

It was from Estaque that on July 16, 1877, he wrote the following letter to one of his old friends—

a letter which forms one of a series which I have been allowed to copy, and which, better than anything else, will show the true Zola, the Zola of behind the scenes.

'. . . We are very comfortable here,' he writes. 'Our arrangements are rather primitive, it is true, but the country is lovely, and I am left in peace, so that I am able to work very hard. I have begun a novel, which is to be called "Une Page d'Amour." It is the best thing that, so far, I have hit upon. The tone is very different from that of "L'Assommoir." For my part, I like it less, because it is rather grey. I am trying to compensate for this with delicacy of touch. Besides, as I want something to contrast in tone with the preceding volume, I must accept this "nymph's thigh" shade.'

It has often been said, and with the greatest injustice, that Zola, being stimulated by the immense success of 'L'Assommoir,' and seeing fortune within his reach, determined to give the public what they seemed to like, and that it was under these circumstances that 'Nana' was written. The stupidity of this malicious libel will be apparent to all who remember that 'Une Page d'Amour' was written after 'L'Assommoir' and before 'Nana,' and that 'Une Page d'Amour' may be described as anything rather than as a bid for the patronage of such part of the readers of 'L'Assommoir' as had been won over to

Zola by the descriptions of the coarser aspects of modern life which found their place in that *chef-d'œuvre*. As a matter of fact, Zola had from the very outset of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series determined to devote one volume to a description of the modern Phryne, and of her influence on society during the period which he had undertaken to portray; a subject all the more difficult for him to treat that the high morality of his life—a morality which many of his Puritan critics might imitate with advantage to themselves and to society—had always kept him away from the class of society in which Phryne is queen. The *demi-monde* was to him a closed book, and of vice he knew but what he had overheard when starving in the *hôtels borgnes* in which he had made his *débuts* in Paris. His knowledge of the behind-the-scenes of the theatres, gained during his not very successful experiences as a dramatic author, came in very useful for certain parts of the book, in which much of the action takes place in the *coulisses* of a boulevard theatre. His notebooks on this side of modern life were fairly well filled, and it needed but a visit or two in company of M. Ludovic Halévy to the Variétés Theatre, which was to be the theatre described in his book, to complete his information on this subject. As to the lives of the Phrynes of the Second Empire, Zola addressed himself to many of his friends. An old

viveur, whose acquaintance he had made at Flaubert's house, spent a whole afternoon with him at the Café Anglais, where, after lunch, he unburdened himself to his attentive host of all the souvenirs of his festive days of tariffed gallantry. Notebook in hand, Zola cross-examines him at length, ferreting for details, acquiring all the shameful *technique* of the trade. Some days later he called at one of the princely abodes of a celebrated *demi-mondaine* who had been in high repute under the Second Empire, and visited her house from basement to attic, all to be reproduced in detailed description in 'Nana.' Then, again, he manages to get himself—he, most moral of men—to the house of another celebrated *demi-mondaine*, and is present at a royal supper. Other friends supply him with souvenirs. The incident of the arrival at Nana's party of a band of elegant young men who had not been invited was supplied by one who was accustomed to such suppers; that of the pastime of these gentlemen in watering the piano with the contents of the bottles on the supper-table was supplied by another friend.

The outline of the story was ready in 1878, though it was not until the spring of 1879 that he began to write it, the meantime being spent in the way described.

In a letter to the friend to whom I have alluded, dated from Médan, July 26, 1878, he says :—

'Thank you a thousand times for your notes. They are excellent, and I shall make use of them all. The dinner especially is stupefying. I would like to have a hundred pages of such notes; I should then be able to write a very strong book. If you or your friends can find anything else, send me more. I am hungering for things seen.

'I have the plan of "Nana," and I am very pleased with it. I spent three days in making up the names of the characters, and some of them are very good indeed. I must tell you that I have sixty characters. I shall not be able to set to work on the *ébauche*, presumably, for at least another fortnight, so many details are there to be put in order. I have seen Maupassant, who brought me my boat "Nana." And that is all; not another human face.'

In June 1879, 'Nana' now being under way, he writes :—

'To-morrow, Sunday, I shall try to go to Flaubert's after the Grand Prix race, which I am forced to visit—a task laid on me for "Nana."'

It will be remembered that one of the great scenes in the book is at the Grand Prix.

Zola spent several months, devoting one fortnight to his novel, and the other to his dramatic criticisms for the 'Voltaire,' and to his article for Russia, over which he used to spend a week. In the fortnight devoted to 'Nana' he produced a chapter, thus

writing a chapter of about forty to fifty-five pages each month. By the end of September about seven chapters, or half the book, had been written. He was now approached by the editor of the 'Voltaire,' with which he was already connected, who asked him to give him his novel for publication as a *feuilleton*. Although only half of it was written, Zola accepted, soon to regret his decision. The editor flooded Paris with advertisements of the forthcoming serial. The walls were covered with coloured posters; hundreds of sandwich-men paraded the streets; everywhere, even on the pipe-lights in the tobacconists' shops, could be read in huge letters the behest, 'READ "NANA."' The discussions provoked, the interest awakened, could not but disturb the calm of the author; the fever of the world could not but to some degree communicate itself to him, and after the first instalment had appeared in the 'Voltaire'—that is to say, on October 15, 1879—the quiet retreat of Médan was invaded with the noise of the outer world. Letters of approval and of blame poured in on him; the reporters flocked in in shoals; and the desirable calm in which he had worked in the old days of his obscurity seemed to him, now that success had definitely come, what might never come again, and for that reason all the more to be regretted.

The following letters, written by Zola whilst 'Nana' was being produced, will show with what

anxious search after truth, with what minute care of detail, he worked:—

Médan, November 8, 1879.

'. . . I never expected to get much information from the carriage-builders. I have often had to return empty handed. You can have no idea how difficult it is to get particulars about even the simplest things.

'Should you learn anything please send it to me. I want particularly to know about H——'s tandem, for I have used it, and what you say makes me think that I have described it wrongly. What is the exact, correct name of the kind of carriage that he described to us, if it isn't a tandem? Your notes on Mabille will suffice. I sha'n't make more than a page of that scene. My life is being worried out of me in studying the rascally races.

'Another thing. Could you, without too much trouble, find out if there are in the Grand Hôtel, quite at the top, on the upper stories, rooms which look out on the boulevard, and, in case there are, what these rooms are like? There is no hurry about it; it is for my last chapter.'

Nana dies in a room on an upper story of the Grand Hótel, as readers of the novel will remember.

Médan, December 13, 1879.

'. . . Splendid weather for working, absolute silence, a retreat at the world's end. "Nana" is

getting on; I am in the middle of the last chapter but one. The snow excites me. You can have no idea of the horror of the landscape, with the white plain and the frozen river. . . . If the thaw does not come soon, I shall find myself here without the notes necessary for my last chapter. I must know whether there are rooms on the upper stories of the Grand Hôtel which look out on the boulevard, rooms which are not too highly priced, no matter what sort of rooms; but I should like to know what they cost, how they are built, as close a description of them as possible. I also must know what is seen, a general effect, from the windows of these rooms, and what one hears coming up from the street below. There's a heavy task for you. See if you can't get into the Grand Hôtel on some pretext or other. You might possibly tell the truth. In any case, let me know if you think that you will be able to send me these notes, which I shall need in about ten days. Between then and now I may possibly come to Paris, and then we can talk about it; but you must act as if I were walled up here and couldn't get out. Laffitte [the director of the 'Voltaire'] has been worrying me. He took advantage of a moment when I was very nervous to make me agree to the suppression of certain passages, by frightening me as to the consequences. Nothing else. I am working like a negro.

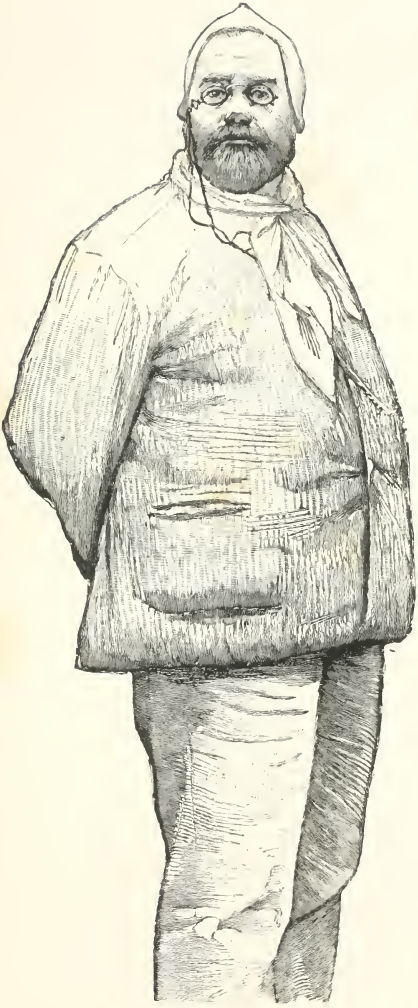
'. . . Oh, by the way, I forgot. I shall want an exact, scientific, and very detailed description of the death-mask of a woman who died of common small-pox. Thanks in advance.'

When one remembers what was said and written about Zola, especially in England, after the publication of 'Nana,' it is interesting to read this letter, which shows him working in solitude down at Médan, with no other preoccupation than to be able to tell the strictest truth in the book that he is writing.

Médan, December 16, 1879.

'. . . Your plans are excellent. Only try to get the information I have asked for without having to give yourself so much trouble. With regard to the death-mask, if you cannot procure a photograph of a woman who died under the conditions indicated, just send me a very precise and very technical description of the appearance, and I will work it out. I repeat that I sha'n't need it for from eight to ten days. If the thaw continues I shall go to Paris, but let us act in the meanwhile as though we were not to meet.

'. . . "Nana" disgusts me in the "Voltaire," and I would give a good deal to see its publication in that journal ended. The last chapters are coming out very well. No matter; I have not the least idea what this book may be worth. Never have I been



M. Zola in his Working Dress.

so worried, never have I so anxiously desired to judge of the whole effect [*l'effet d'ensemble*] of one of my books. You will have to tell me very frankly what you think of it.'

There seems to have been some difficulty in procuring the scientific particulars necessary for the description of poor Gervaise's daughter on her death-bed. On the 18th of the same month Zola writes again :—

'. . . I have received your book on small-pox. Evidently that will be enough for my purpose. I will invent the death-mask by a comparison of the various documents. I am very much tempted to make it black small-pox, which, in point of horror, is the most original. Only I will confess that if you could manage to see a corpse of a person who died of this disease without taking too much trouble—I say, this is a nice little job!—you would oblige me greatly. In that way I should not have to invent anything—I should have a real death-mask. Be sure to dwell at length on the state of the eyes, of the nose, and of the mouth, to give me a precise and geographical chart, in which I should only take, of course, what I need. There is less hurry about that than about the Grand Hôtel. And remember that I don't want you to take too much trouble about the matter. If the worst comes to the worst I can manage with what I have.

'Once more thanks. There is no news. I am finishing Chapter XII., which is giving me trouble. In eight days I hope to have the pleasure of shaking hands with you, for my head is like to burst with its *idée fixe* and with the heat of my stove. I should like to move about a bit before setting to work upon my last chapter.'

Another letter, dated Médan, December 25, 1879:—

'. . . I am finishing the chapter of which I read you the beginning—a terrible ending' (Zola here alludes to Chapter XIII.) 'which frightens me myself. I do not see how this horror of massacre and *effondrement* can ever be surpassed.'

The horror of preceding passages seems to have shocked Paris, for Laffitte, the director of the 'Voltaire,' in which the story was then being published, had repeatedly to ask Zola to tone down his descriptions. About this Zola writes, on January 1, 1880:—

'. . . I had to go to Paris to spend a few hours. All kinds of petty bothers called me thither, amongst others a new panic on Laffitte's part. He has been talking with Gambetta, and Gambetta finds "Nana" too strong. You can imagine the state he was in. I don't think that my book is seriously menaced, but I nevertheless agreed to cut out certain passages just to have peace, and to show that I am willing to be

reasonable, and how little I care about this form of publication in *feuilleton*. So that, starting from the chapter about the races, you only read my novel in a cut-up and Bowdlerised state. I am sorry, for there is fine passion in one of the chapters—Chapter XIII. I begin upon the fourteenth and last to-morrow, so that there are still from eight to ten days of work before me.

'I am writing you in great haste. What I chiefly wanted to tell you is that I shall not need your notes on Nana's death-mask before the 4th or the 5th of January, and that, in any case, what I have would suffice me.'

'Nana' was finished on January 7, 1880. It is in the following terms that Zola announces this news to his friend :—

'. . . As you take interest in "Nana," and as you supplied me with such good particulars towards the writing of it, let me tell you a great piece of news—I finished "Nana" this morning.

'What a sigh of relief! Never has a piece of work so upset me. Now let the novel be worth what it may be worth, it has ceased to exist for me.

'Never mind troubling any further about the death-mask of a victim of the small-pox. I have done what I wanted to do, and I am so satisfied with it that I wouldn't change it even to be in

accordance with precise documents. I write to you in the joy of deliverance, and my last chapter appears to me to be the most weird and the most successful thing that I have written.'

'Nana' was published as a volume as originally written—that is to say, without the cuttings that Laffitte's prudence and Gambetta's advice had imposed—on February 15. It was a gigantic success. The first edition, which was entirely taken up by the trade, many orders having been on file more than a year previously, consisted of 55,000 copies, and on the very day of publication Mr. Charpentier was obliged to send an order down to the printing office that an additional 10,000 copies should be printed as soon as possible. To-day the 166th edition of 1,000 copies is on sale in Paris. Many people blame Zola for writing this book. The reader of this notice will have learnt how and under what circumstances it was written, and will admit that, if blame there be, it is not to Zola that it should be applied. The subject attracted him as a splendid opportunity for saying what had to be said on the vice and folly of the period about which he had to write. It is possible that the book may have attracted the public for other reasons, but how is that the fault of Zola—the moral, truth-seeking, and conscientious writer?

CHAPTER XIII

'LES SOIRÉES DE MÉDAN'—ZOLA AT HOME

It was in the spring of this year, 1880, that the famous collection of stories known as 'Les Soirées de Médan' was published; famous because it contained that unsurpassed masterpiece of our dear and great De Maupassant, 'Boule de Suif.'

It has been stated that this book was published in order to show the world what kind of work the various members of the naturalistic school could produce. This is not the case. Amongst the people who used to visit Zola at Médan were a number of young writers who had written stories, and the idea once came to one of them that a volume of short stories, one from the pen of each of the *intimes*, would be a pleasant memorial of their friendship. Accordingly, Guy de Maupassant, Henry Céard, Huysmans, Hennique, and Paul Alexis each gave a story, which, with one of Zola's *nouvelles*, was enough to make up a volume of the size of the Charpentier edition.

None of the stories with the exception of De Maupassant's *chef-d'œuvre* were very remarkable, Zola being otherwise engaged, and the rest of the contributors, though they have all since distinguished themselves, being still quite young men.

Poor De Maupassant played a practical joke on the critics in connection with the publication of this book, which was destined to raise him at once to the level of the first French *littérateurs*—a position he afterwards so brilliantly maintained. He contributed, *à propos* of the 'Soirées de Médan,' a long article to the 'Gaulois,' in which he gave a most fanciful description of the circumstances under which the book had been written. The article, however interesting and amusing, especially in view of De Maupassant's recent deplorable end, is too long for publication here, but the gist of it will be gathered from a perusal of the following paragraph from Albert Wolff's 'Courrier de Paris'—a kind of Paris letter—contributed to the 'Figaro' of April 19, 1880 :—

'The *bourgeois* of Médan has sometimes good sense, not always. Here he has been taking under the protection of his name a series of short stories, of no importance whatever, which the young people about him have entitled "Les Soirées de Médan." A pretentious title, which seems to imply that the pretty village between Poissy and Triel is as widely known as the capitals of Europe. For the benefit of

Médan.

my country and foreign readers I must say a word about Médan. Zola has built a country house there, where during eight months in the year he lives, surrounded by his flatterers, spending the other four months of the year in Paris in the society of the same young people, who call him "dear master" in the expectation of hailing him as the Great Citizen of Médan. These young people really believe that the mere presence of Zola at Médan will henceforth place this village amongst the historical places in France, and that Zola's house should be visited with the same interest as the Palace of Versailles or the Castle of Blois. It may be even that they are soliciting the Minister to arrange that the administration of the Beaux-Arts should issue tickets of admission to tourists to visit Zola's cottage, just as it is done for the Gobelins, the Cluny Museum, and the Sèvres manufactory.

'The *naïveté* of these young people equals their pretentiousness. One of them, Maupassant, in the "Gaulois" has publicly confessed how this volume of short stories came into existence. The story is curious. Behold them one summer evening under the trees. One has just taken a swim in the river, another has been walking about the country with light ideas in his head. Just think of that. They are all lying on their backs, contemplating the stars which shine up there. Merimée's name is

mentioned. "C'est un imbécile," remarks one of the little naturalists. Another yawns and says that the country bores him. That is what they think and that is how they write. And it is this little group of young prigs who in a most insolent preface throw down the glove to the critics. But old birds are not to be caught with chaff. Their idea was: Let us get ourselves "slated," that will help to sell the book. I trust that my *confrères* who have grown grey in harness will not let themselves be taken in by such a schoolboy's trick. "Les Soirées de Médan" are not worth a line of criticism. With the exception of Zola's story, with which the book opens, the stories are of the last mediocrity.'

Poor Wolff, no doubt he often regretted writing those last lines. Still, as a specimen of what some criticism is worth, the passage is worth retaining. It is now generally allowed that Maupassant's tale, published in that volume, namely, 'Boule de Suif,' far from being of the 'last mediocrity,' is one of the finest short stories that has ever been written, and, as has been remarked, it was this story that made the author's reputation at a single stroke.

In the same 'Courrier de Paris' in the 'Figaro' Wolff chronicles the death and funeral of Duranty, who, it will be remembered, was one of Zola's friends whilst he was a clerk at Hachette's, and who had such an influence on him as a writer. He appears to have

been an unsuccessful man, and to have remained in obscurity whilst Zola emerged into light. Wolff says of him that he was, with Courbet and Champfleury, one of the inventors of realistic art—which since has been transformed into naturalism—and adds, that he quite understands that Zola, whom Duranty appointed his testamentary executor, should have refused to pronounce a speech over his friend's grave for fear of incurring the reproach of desiring to advertise himself by the comparison which people would not have been able to help themselves from instituting between his success and Duranty's failure. It appears that for some time previously there had been a Zola party and a Duranty party, and that the two men had in some sort been put up in rivalry to each other. Well, poor Duranty is now totally forgotten.

Zola's Paris address was at that time 23 rue de Boulogne, *au troisième*. A writer of the period gives us a description of the home of the now successful novelist :—

'After waiting some minutes in a vestibule five feet square,' he writes, 'I was ushered by a *valet-de-chambre* into the *cabinet de travail* of the author of "Les Rougon-Macquart." It is a large room, into which the light penetrates with difficulty. The windows, which are very large, are reduced on the inside to very small dimensions by the application of

broad Bonne-Grâce window hangings of blue plush, on which flower-embroideries cut out from antique Italian chasubles are sewn. Curtains of white lace and double curtains of red *crêpon de Chine* contribute to increase the darkness of the room, and to render it severe and almost lugubrious of aspect. However, when the *portières* which separate this room from the adjoining bedroom are drawn back, this impression of sadness is dissipated. Through the windows beyond, on which the sun shines, can be seen a mass of verdure, the foliage of the lime and plane trees.

'The *cabinet de travail* is furnished with furniture of every epoch, every style, and every country. The work-table, of Dutch origin, dates from Louis XIII.; the huge writing-chair of solid rosewood, which fronts it, dates from the epoch of Louis XIV., and was bought in Portugal. I noticed, moreover, two small bookcases of the Louis XVI. period, containing Zola's favourite works; a little Louis XV. table, a delicious Louis XV. corner table, a piano, a *garniture de cheminée* of great artistic value, and two magnificent Persian vases containing bunches of lilac, no doubt from the garden of Médan. Above one of the doors, as a kind of scallop, was an Italian altar-hanging embroidered with Venetian beads, which dates from the seventeenth century. There are numerous pictures on the walls, for the most part of small originality, and without much value. All

belong to the impressionist school. The most remarkable are the portrait of Zola painted by Manet, and some landscapes painted by Monet, Cézanne, and Pissaro.

'Very few books.

'Nothing need be said about the dining-room, except that it contains an immense aviary.

'But the bedroom is very curious. The walls are hung with antique tapestries from the Château d'Amboise. The windows are of stained glass of different epochs, from the twelfth to the seventeenth century. Some of them are very beautiful. In the window to the right there is to be admired a Sainte-Barbe and a Rebecca at the Fountain, two magnificent works of art of the seventeenth century. Between the two windows is a huge coffer of carved iron. A Louis XIII. bed, tall and massive, is ornamented with hangings made from chasubles in Genoese velvet. To the left of the fireplace is a *contador*, to the right an antique Breton cupboard. The mantel-piece, which is covered with a magnificent piece of tapestry, is ornamented with some superb antique majolica potteries. One feels at once that one is in the presence of a man who loves his *chez-soi*, and who simply prefers, after the fashion of the English, the pleasure of work and the incomparable comforts of home to the fugitive and shallow pleasures of society. There are in M. Zola's workroom, to be sure, a quantity

of trifles and knickknacks the use of which the visitor has some difficulty in understanding. But it is fair to add that there is no disorder in their arrangement, that everything seems to be in its place, and that nothing has been sacrificed to caprice. It is evident that M. Zola is a man of order and of method. The writing-table is at one end of the room. M. Zola I found sitting in the Portuguese *fauteuil* of which I have spoken, over the back of which a thick fur had been thrown. He wears a short jacket in black stuff, which, it must be said, by no means reminds one of Balzac's monkish gown—Balzac, his master, or rather his model.

'M. Zola's personal appearance is known to everybody. His photographs are very like him. Somebody once said that he has the head of a thinker and the body of an athlete. This is quite true. There is in his face a vague expression of sincere bitterness or of deep contempt, which would be more appreciable if the thick but unsensuous lips had not something of that brutal *raillerie* which characterises certain Italian types.

'Well built, broad, full-chested, with a framework of strong bones, his black hair and beard, thick and cut short, give him a look of virility and of asceticism which denotes great strength of will and indicates sufficiently clearly his love of solitude, his delight in thought, and the broadest sense of observation.'

Already at this time Zola had his whole plan for the conclusion of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series worked out. Nine novels had been published; there remained accordingly eleven more to be written. But at that time he was only certain as to the exact nature of seven of the eleven novels.

In a letter written by Zola shortly after the publication of 'Nana,' the following plan of literary campaign was drawn up. He announced his intention of writing:—

1st. A novel in which Pauline Quénu would figure.

2nd. A study of railway life with Etienne Lantier as hero.

3rd. A study of an art-life with Claude Lantier.

4th. A study of life in the big shops with Octave Mouret.

5th. A volume with Jean Macquart as hero. 'This will be a study of life amongst the peasants. It will be my favourite book. I shall spend six months in the country, studying my subject in all its aspects. It will be neither in Beauce, which is monotonous, nor in Brittany, which is sad, nor in Sologne, which is dull, but in the Auge valley.'

6th. Another volume with Jean Macquart. 'This will be a study of military life. My original intention was to write a novel about the war with Austria, but I have since decided upon Sedan. Sedan closes

the period in which my characters move; besides, I do not know Italy.

7th. 'I shall take up the people again. In the "Assommoir" I have written of the life of the people. In this new book I shall study their connection with politics. I shall frequent workmen's political meetings and depict them; in one word, I shall show the workman in his *rôle* as a social factor. There will be a study of newspaper life, and perhaps one also of the magistracy, in this book.'

8th. A criminal story with one of Lantier's sons.

9th. A final novel with the Doctor Pascal Rougon. 'It has not been noticed that I have preserved, as episodic characters, Aristide Saccard's daughter, and the old great-grandmother.'

10th. Zola concludes by saying that he is not certain what will be the subject of the other two novels. He would like them to be entertaining works, the writing of which would relieve his task, and in which he proposed to make a new departure in style and treatment. It will be seen upon a comparison of this list of proposed novels with the list of books written by Zola after it was drawn up—that is to say, after the publication of 'Nana'—that his intentions were only carried out in respect of seven novels. These are:—

1st. 'La Joie de Vivre,' with Pauline Quénu.

2nd. 'La Bête Humaine,' with Etienne Lantier,

in which, no doubt, he amalgamated his idea of a criminal story with one of Lantier's sons.

3rd. 'L'Œuvre,' with Claude Lantier.

4th. 'Au Bonheur des Dames,' with Octave Mouret.

5th. 'La Terre,' with Jean Macquart.

6th. 'La Débâcle,' with Jean Macquart.

7th. 'Le Docteur Pascal.'

The criminal story was never written, nor the second novel about the people, and in their places and in those of the two books of which the subjects were not decided, and of which Zola wrote that they were to be works of entertainment, four masterpieces were given—namely, 'Germinal,' 'Pot-Bouille,' 'Le Rêve,' and 'L'Argent;' the first of these, in which to some extent he incorporated his idea of the political aspect of popular life, is considered, together with 'L'Assommoir,' by a large majority of Zola's readers as the finest of the series. There are others, it is true, who prefer 'Le Rêve' to any of the other books; whilst it may be noted that perhaps of all the volumes that he has written Zola likes the last of these four, 'L'Argent,' the best. The order in which the books were written, as may be seen by another glance at the printed list of his books, differed from that indicated above, and was as follows:—'Pot-Bouille,' 'Au Bonheur des Dames,' 'La Joie de Vivre,' 'Germinal,' 'L'Œuvre,' 'La Terre,' 'Le Rêve,'

'La Bête Humaine,' 'L'Argent,' 'La Débâcle,' and 'Le Docteur Pascal,' as to the position of which, as the *finale* and conclusion of the whole series, Zola had never had any doubt.

At first Zola tried to carry out his plan in the order indicated. Faithful to his system, he desired, by way of contrast to 'Nana,' with its high lights and violent colour, to give a sober picture of pain and self-sacrifice, with Pauline Quénu as heroine. It was to be a very simple story, with only two or three characters. He was not, however, able to satisfy himself as to its construction, and after various attempts put it away, to take it up again some years later, when he wrote 'La Joie de Vivre.' And one reason which largely contributed to his reluctance to continue this book was that the sadness of its subject reminded him too bitterly of a great sadness which had recently come into his life—namely, of the sudden death of his dearly beloved mother, who expired at Médan on October 17, 1880. If the letters which Zola wrote on that occasion to his friends could be printed, there is not a man, even amongst his severest critics, who would not revise his judgment. When the definite 'Life and Letters of Emile Zola' commences to be written, these epistles will do more perhaps to consecrate him a great man than anything that he has written. The tender piety, the lofty sorrow, and the heartfulness that are breathed in

every line of these noble testimonials to the beautiful character of his dear mother make these letters the noblest and most beautiful pieces of French prose that can be read. After reading them one is filled with astonishment that against this good and tender son, this quiet, devoted, home-loving man, the accusations of wilful corruption of morals, of literary profligacy, can ever have been brought.

CHAPTER XIV

'POT-BOUILLE'—'AU BONHEUR DES DAMES'

It was whilst he was unsuccessfully attempting to work out the story that was afterwards written and published as 'La Joie de Vivre' that a phrase of his in an article which he contributed to the 'Figaro' on the subject of conjugal infidelity in the middle classes or *bourgeoisie*, and which in this phrase he attributed to the *milieu* and education, or rather want of education—just as the *milieu* in which the people move and the education of the children of the people are, to a large extent, responsible for the number of unfortunate women on the streets—suggested to him a novel which, describing the life of the Parisian middle classes, just as he had described the life of the lower classes in 'L'Assommoir,' would be a contrast and a pendant to that book. This idea pleased him so much that he immediately laid aside his work on 'Pauline Quénu,' which was progressing slowly under the difficulties described, and set to work to study his new subject. In 'L'Assommoir'

he had taken for his study a house in the miserable rue de la Goutte d'Or, a hive of Nethinim, the very walls of which exuded the sweat of vice and misery. His task was now to examine with as much care some fine house in a new quarter, to describe it as though its walls were made of glass, so that his readers might see into this abode of middle-class luxury and watch every action of its tenants, to tear off the mask of middle-class hypocrisy, and to show that vice is as ugly in velvets and under sanctimonious exteriors as it is in rags and in the kennels of the poor. The title was soon hit upon—'Pot-Bouille'—which was meant to imply that the book was a study of *pot-au-feu* existence, the *pot-au-feu*, or soup-cauldron, having been from time immemorial the emblem of French middle-class home life. It was to be to the boast of the Parisian *bourgeoisie* that 'we represent honour, morality, and family life' an answer to the effect that this was a lie, that the *bourgeois* was the negation of all these virtues, and that the soup-cauldron, or *pot-bouille*, of which, as the emblem of their respectability, they were so proud, was a cauldron in which all that is rotten in modern family life and all that is lax in modern social morality are eternally simmering.

For the subject of his story he consulted his friends and consulted his own souvenirs, which, seeing that his life had been mainly passed in the

middle-class society that he proposed to flagellate, afforded him abundant material. His next step was to pay frequent visits to the rue de Choiseul, where the house that was to be the scene of the action of his story was to be placed. He afterwards visited the church of St. Roch and took copious notes. His materials having been got together, he packed up his trunk and betook himself back to Médan to work.

He was not, however, to be allowed to start upon his novel as quickly as he had hoped. On May 6 of that year (1881) he writes to his friend:—

'I don't know what is the matter with me. I can't get to work on my novel. Since I have got back here and settled down again I have been flooded with stupid occupations.'

Some time later—the card on which this message is written is without date—he wrote:—

'. . . I have set to work on the plan of my novel, and things are going very well. I believe that I shall write an amusing and a terrible book.'

The plan of this book was all the more carefully prepared because Zola had determined to use a new literary formula in writing 'Pot-Bouille.' It was to be the definite renouncement of romantic traditions; the descriptions were to be of the shortest, not more than five lines to each; the novel was to resemble a stage piece, each chapter corresponding, as it were,

to the act of a play. The plot was to interweave five or six stories, a large number of characters were to be introduced, the incidents were to be varied and multiple. The whole book was mapped out into eighteen chapters.

For this work, as for all the others, as many exact facts, as much true scientific information as possible, were collected. His constant anxiety to be true is again shown in the letters which he wrote during the period of gestation of this book.

'Thyebaut and Huysmans,' he writes from Médan under date of May 12, 'have sent me some excellent information. Don't hurry about the stockbroker's clerk nor about that famous treatise on female hysteria. I shall not need these details before my third or fourth chapter. All is ready, but I shall not begin writing before the middle of next week.'

Again, on May 27, 1881:—

'. . . I forgot to tell you that my architect is to be a diocesan architect. How much are these men paid, what have they to do, and what are their relations with the clergy? I am really taking too great advantage of your friendship. What is the salary and what is the work of a *conseiller à la Cour de Paris* (a judge)? What is the exact kind of business which a commission-dealer engages in, and what may be his average profits? Has he to have an office, and so on? And, finally, what are about the

wages of a small clerk in the Public Education Office, and how do these increase? Have clerks in the Government Office to pass an examination, and are there any supernumerary clerks, &c.?'

How far this takes us from the 'pen, paper, ink, and table' which an English novelist described as the sole requisites for the plying of the novelist's trade!

On June 3 Zola wrote again:—

'. . . Thank you for your information about the commission agents: it is very clear, and will amply suffice for my purpose. Here are two new requests. I have an old Government clerk retired on pension. I want his pension to be about eighty pounds a year. Can you tell me what he would have done at his office, and in what Government office—I should prefer the Home Office—and at what age he would take his pension, supposing him to have entered the Civil Service at the age of twenty? If to be entitled to a pension of eighty pounds a year he must have held too high a position, tell me about the clerkships which would entitle a man to a pension of from twelve to fifteen hundred francs a year.

'My second question is as to the work of a stockbroker's clerk—an active clerk, who has been put into the stockbroker's office in order to learn the business, with a view to the purchase of a share in it. A thousand thanks in advance. I have finished my plan, and I am very well satisfied with it.'

On June 16 :—

'. . . I went on Tuesday to the Church of St. Roch, and took some excellent notes. But I had no time to study with care the two houses in the rue St. Roch which are numbered 22 and 24, and from which access is gained into the church. They evidently belong to the church, and must, I suppose, be tenanted by the *curé* and by the priests. But I should like to be sure about it. I smell out here a very interesting corner. Did you not tell me that somebody could give you some information on the subject? Do try to get me particulars about these two houses, either by getting into them, or by getting people who live there to talk. You would render me a fine service. I began my work this morning. There is at least a year's work before me.'

Eight days later :—

'. . . Huysmans sent me yesterday particulars about St. Roch. My notes are now complete.

'We expect to leave towards the end of July. Till then I shall try to finish at least two chapters of my novel. I progress with my usual slowness, three pages a day, and only five days' work in each week, without counting unavoidable interruptions. It is the continuity of effort which makes big monuments.'

The last sentence is the axiom of Zola's literary life. It is, in other words, a paraphrase of that

excellent doctrine which all children learn, and which is embodied in the verse beginning—

'Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand.'

Zola left Médan towards the end of July, as announced in his letter. On August 8, 1881, he writes from Grandcamp in Calvados, on the Normandy coast :—

'. . . We have been here a fortnight now, and I write to give you my news. The house is very uncomfortable, but it is queerly perched on the very edge of the sea, and I can work here all the same in spite of the noise from the bathing machines hard by. It is a long time since I was in such good working health.'

Another letter :—

Grandcamp, August 24, '81.

'. . . I continue to work in a good state of mental equilibrium. My novel is certainly only a task requiring precision and clearness. No *bravura*, not the least lyrical treat. It does not give me any warm satisfactions, but it amuses me like a piece of mechanism with a thousand wheels, of which it is my duty to regulate the movement with the most minute care. I ask myself this question: Is it good policy, when one feels that one has passion in one, to check it, or even to bridle it? If one of my books is

destined to become immortal, it will, I am sure, be the most passionate one. Well, well!—one must change one's tune, and try one's hand at all things.

'All this is mere self-examination, for, I repeat, I am very well satisfied with "Pot-Bouille," which I call my "Sentimental Education."'

The novelist returned to Médan in the autumn. On October 1 he writes from his country house :—

'. . . I am setting to work again in hard earnest. I have finished my "Bénédictions des Poignards," and I think I have done all that was to be done with it, and in three pages. It is, after all, only the groundwork of a picture, by necessity effaced in tone. Thank you for your excellent notes.

'We are arranging to pass the winter in quiet and in work. My life is becoming very simple. It seems to me that I see very clearly now. All I ask for is this—good brain-health, to write a very clear and sober book. Altogether, I am satisfied.'

Zola's new literary departure in 'Pot-Bouille' did not please the critics, nor, indeed, many of the author's admirers. He alludes to their reproaches in a letter which he wrote to his friend on February 8 of the following year, still from Médan :—

'. . . I am stupefied at the cavilling about certain sentences in 'Pot-Bouille.' It is in point of style the clearest and most condensed of my novels. I shall finish it in five or six days. I have put the drag

on myself for fear of running away. I want to finish flatly.'

In point of commercial success this novel stands eighth on the list of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series. The eighty-second edition was lately on sale in Paris.

The readers of 'Pot-Bouille' will remember that allusion is made in this book to a shop entitled, 'Au Bonheur des Dames.' This shop was in Zola's mind the embryo of the gigantic Parisian warehouses, such as the Louvre and the Bon Marché—colossal commercial organisations which have their equals in the retail trade only in some of the American cities. It was natural enough that such a feature of modern Parisian life—this little world within a world, with its inhabitants, their lives, their ethics, and their morals, and above all the complete modernity of a system which threatens to revolutionise the whole commercial world, and which in some sort contains the germ of that co-operation and its benefits to society which certain Socialist writers have preached as a solution of the social question—should tempt a writer whose ambition it was and is to paint modern life in all its aspects, and who, describing himself as a progressist, has always shown the keenest interest in the developments thereof.

The title of the new book having been found—no small matter in Zola's estimation—he again set to work to get his materials. This was done in his

usual way, by paying repeated visits to the Louvre and Bon Marché, spending whole days in exploring all the gigantic ramifications of these monster warehouses, interviewing the salesmen and saleswomen on their pay, on their food, on their relations with their employers, on the way they slept, and talked, and amused themselves; following parties of *calicots* —such being the generic name given in Paris to the *employés* of retail shops—in their pleasure parties on Sundays to the country and on the river, investigating their *amourettes*, annotating their special slang words; interrogating small shopkeepers in the vicinity of the big warehouses, to hear the expression of their grievances against these all-devouring monsters; drawing pen-pictures of such shops; visiting the proprietors of the aforesaid warehouses and finding out what capital was employed and what were the average returns; interrogating the manufacturers of the various classes of goods of which these warehouses make a speciality, with particular attention to Lyons silk, a chapter having to be based on a heroic conflict between the 'Bonheur des Dames' and a small neighbouring shop over the sale of a particular quality of silk; studying up in medical books the question of kleptomania, a problem with which all the big stores in Paris have to deal; chatting with ladies who frequent these shops as to the displays which please them most, and the articles

which most easily prompt them to unloosen the strings of the purse; passing whole hours noting the various details of the make-up of the show windows—that bait thrown out to catch the passer-by—and only returning to the quiet and seclusion of Médan when every particular had been noted down and all the material was ready.

Work, and work only, was Zola's preoccupation. After his return to Médan, in 1882, his friends were left for some time without any news of him. 'What has become of Zola?' was a question that one heard repeatedly. To a friend who wrote to ask him this question he answered, on June 16 of that year (1882):—

'. . . What has become of me? Nothing, my good friend. I am in my hole, and I am working. The first chapter of "Le Bonheur" is finished, and I am in the midst of the second—another book which is a pure *tour de force*, and which will finish by disgusting people with the complicated state of our literature. Generally speaking, though, I am satisfied. No news, as you may guess. There is no news here. What I did last year I am doing this year, and shall, it is quite certain, do next year. Your letter is the first human voice that I have heard for over a month. This solitude is excellent, for I have noticed that it produces a most lucid state of mind in me. I shall not go to Paris again until I have finished

my second chapter; that is to say, not before the 25th of this month.'

During the summer of this year M. Zola's friends had cause for some anxiety. Suddenly taken ill, he was considered in danger. It was said that he had overworked himself, and that intense nervous prostration, which might lead to serious complications, was the result. However, by the end of October of that year he was up and at work again, as he writes in a letter under that date:—

'. . . I am a little better again. I have been able to get back to work. All the same, I don't feel at all solid. I fancy that something very serious brushed past me, but which spared me this time, for I feel quite *bouleversé*, as after a very serious illness. The truth is that I am abominably fatigued. What a heavy thing is the pen! I ought to be able to live like an idiot for two or three years, so as to get back my strength. I am terrified, such a coward have I become, at the prospect of having to finish my novel.'

Work, however, has always been in Zola's opinion the panacea for all evils, physical as well as mental. Quite recently, in speaking before the Paris Students' Association, he formulated his creed on this subject:—

'How many mornings have I sat down to my work-table with my head in confusion, my mouth

bitter, tortured by some great mental or physical anguish! And on each occasion, in spite of the reluctance that was prompted by my sufferings, my work, after the first minutes of pain and revolt, brought me relief and comfort. I have invariably risen up from my daily task with a feeling of relief, my heart sore, perhaps, but nevertheless conscious that I was still erect, with strength enough to continue living until the morrow.'

His panacea seems on this occasion also to have stood him in good stead. On October 25 we heard him complaining of his health and longing for rest, yet at the same time announcing his firm intention to continue work. On November 15 following he writes: '. . . I have got back to work with sufficient courage, and my intellectual health is good.'

'Au Bonheur des Dames' was finished on January 27 of the following year. This is how Zola announces it to his friend:—

Médan, January 30, 1883.

'. . . I finished my novel on Thursday, and I am in the joy of this great relief. And now to work on the next.'

The exact words in the letter are, in French, 'À un autre,' the word 'roman' being understood. Was ever man more justly entitled to preach what Mr. Stead has called the 'gospel of work' than Emile Zola? The book which nearly cost him his life is

finished; he cannot repress a cry of exultation at being freed from the task it laid upon him; and in the same breath he welcomes the task of the book that, according to his self-imposed command, was to follow. A big monument had to be erected, and the continuity of effort could not be interrupted even for a single hour.

CHAPTER XV

'LA JOIE DE VIVRE'—'GERMINAL'—'MÉDAN'

After the publication of 'Au Bonheur des Dames,' Zola returned to his bold idea of an analysis of human suffering, personified in the person of Pauline Quénu, the heroic girl who sacrifices her fortune and her love to the interests of a family of egotists. For this work of analysis little documentation was requisite. The plan had already been drawn up, and after some revision and correction could be used as the framework of the story. Still, particulars had to be collected, and on April 29, 1883, Zola writes to his friend from Médan :—

'. . . We are back here again. I began writing my novel on Wednesday. I try to disassociate my inclinations from big effects. I should like my novel to be simple and easy. And, by the way, try and let me know what are the books that a medical student uses in his first and second years. I forgot to get this particular, and I shall need it.'

The summer of this year was spent at a little

seaside place called Bénodet, in Finistère, which Zola describes in the following words: 'It is a superb country, wild to the point of troubling one. We are within a quarter of an hour's walk from a beach a league in length—sand, and nothing but sand; not a stone anywhere. And the sea is formidable. Add to this that our isolation is absolute. We have to go and fetch our provisions in a boat, just as if we were living on an island. You know that I can work anywhere; well, here the air is so different from what I am accustomed to, that my sentences don't seem steady on their legs.'

Zola was not, however, the man to allow himself to be interfered with in his work by anything, and on August 6 following we find him writing again, from Bénodet, that they have all accustomed themselves very well to this land of savages, and that he has got to be able to work as though he were at home.

'La Joie de Vivre' was finished in the winter of 1883. It was, after the works which preceded 'L'Assommoir,' the least successful, from a commercial point of view, of Zola's novels. The forty-eighth edition was lately on the Paris bookstalls. One has difficulty in understanding why there has been such a great difference in the sales of the various volumes of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series. This difference at least makes one fact patent—and that

is, that a very great number of Zola's readers are not in the least interested in the series as a whole, for otherwise how can one explain that while 127,000 readers have purchased copies of 'L'Assommoir,' only 26,000 have purchased copies of 'La Fortune des Rougon,' which opens the series and in some sort leads up to 'L'Assommoir'? How the sales have varied will be seen by the following statement, the last issued by the publisher of the series:—

'La Fortune des Rougon,' 26th edition; 'La Curée,' 36th edition; 'Le Ventre de Paris,' 33rd edition; 'La Conquête de Plassans,' 25th edition; 'La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret,' 44th edition; 'Son Excellence Eugène Rougon,' 26th edition; 'L'Assommoir,' 127th edition; 'Une Page d'Amour,' 80th edition; 'Nana,' 166th edition; 'Pot-Bouille,' 82nd edition; 'Au Bonheur des Dames,' 62nd edition; 'La Joie de Vivre,' 48th edition; 'Germinal,' 88th edition; 'L'Œuvre,' 55th edition; 'La Terre,' 100th edition; 'Le Rêve,' 88th edition; 'La Bête Humaine,' 88th edition; 'L'Argent,' 83rd edition; 'La Débâcle,' 180th edition.

Perhaps of all these figures the one that will most puzzle as to its significance the student of Zola is that of the sale of 'Germinal,' the book on which he set to work on the day following the one on which he had written 'Finis' at the end of 'La Joie de Vivre.' In point of documentation, of delineation

of character, of splendid writing, and of incidents of the greatest interest, 'Germinal,' to the thinking of many, is Zola's masterpiece. At the same time, there is more than enough of reference to the matters which may have induced some of the 166,000 purchasers of 'Nana' to read that book. 'Germinal' cannot be described as a moral book, and it is in all other respects in Zola's best style, and is also, from its subject—life in the French mines—one of the most interesting. Still, only half as many people have bought it as bought 'Nana.' This is matter that suggests reflection.

Amongst the 88,000 purchasers of 'Germinal' a large number would be found, could the volumes be traced from the bookshop to the bookshelf, amongst the miners themselves. During a recent tour in the mournful mining districts of Belgium, there was not a *coron*, or mining village, that I visited where 'Germinal' was unknown, and where at least one well-thumbed copy of this book could not be found. It was, indeed, in the Borinage, or coal district around Mons, the scene of the recent strike, revolt, and massacre, that Zola to a large extent studied up his subject. 'Germinal' is, next to 'La Débâcle,' the book which gave him the most trouble in the way of documentation. The best part of six months was spent by him in travelling about, note-book in hand, in the various mining districts of the North of

France and of Belgium, interviewing miners, exploring mines from pit-mouth to lowest depths, attending political meetings amongst the miners, studying various types of Socialist lecturers, drinking horrible beer and more horrible brandy in the forlorn *cabarets* of the *corons*, interrogating miners' wives, wandering about the fields in the neighbourhood of these *corons* to watch the lads and lasses taking their poor pastimes after the day's drudgery was over.

In a village not far from Mons, which I visited some days after the fusillade of Mons, to be present at the funeral of one of the miners who had been shot, I fell into conversation with an old *porion*, or 'gaffer,' who told me that he had piloted M. Zola about the Borinage for some days. 'I never heard a man ask more questions,' he said, 'unless it be an examining magistrate. He was curious, was that gentleman.'

In February of 1884 Zola writes from Valenciennes: '. . . At Valenciennes since Saturday amongst the strikers, who are remarkably calm. A splendid country as a scene for my book.'

On January 18 of the following year—that is, in 1885, Zola writes from Médan to the same friend: 'No; "Germinal" is not finished yet. I have five or six more days of work before me. This deuce of a novel has cost me any amount of trouble. But I am very pleased, especially with the second part, and

that is the essential thing. You ought not to read it in the "Gil Blas," for serial publication deforms all.'

Zola has always begged his friends not to read his novels in course of publication in the newspapers; and if he allows this publication at all, it is because splendid offers are made him for the serial rights of his stories, and that experience of the roughest kind has taught him respect for money, though by nature more than indifferent to it. He does not consider the novel as it appears in serial form—that is to say, printed direct from his manuscript—as at all the book itself, seeing that he always spends a great part of his time and gives his best care in revising the proof-sheets which are sent him from the printing office for the publication of the story as a volume. In this matter he follows Balzac's example also, who used to demand proof after proof, and so altered and revised that, having to bear the expense of these corrections himself, his income from his books, which should have been a good one, was reduced by more than half. Jules Verne is another writer who attaches the greatest importance to the correction of proofs, never satisfying himself with less than seven sets, the last of which, he has told me, is usually completely different from the original manuscript. Zola, without going as far as either Balzac or Jules Verne, is still most particular about his corrections, and only thinks that

his responsibility with regard to a book has finished when he has written and signed his 'Bon à tirer' on the last set.

'Germinal' may, I think, be considered Zola's masterpiece. It is free from that taint of romanticism which Zola himself has admitted tinges most of his work, and which, for instance, breaks out in 'L'Assommoir,' in the parts referring to Bazouge, the undertaker's man, and Gervaise's relations with him. There is nothing of this sort in 'Germinal,' which from first to last is a work of documentation and observation of the keenest order. It is strange that its success, though enormous, should not at least have equalled that of 'L'Assommoir,' 'Nana,' and 'La Débâcle.' There is not a dull line in it, and the characters are all exceptionally well drawn.

I have in my possession a letter which Zola wrote some time after the appearance of the book in volume form *à propos* of a critique of the book written by his friend Henri Céard. Giving, as it does, the author's own views about this book, it is worthy of reproduction. He writes from Paris, under date of March, 1885 :—

'My dear Friend,—I have read and re-read your article. Certain parts are of very profound analysis. But I fear that your great friendship for me has inspired you with too much praise. In one word, and speaking plainly, do you really think so very well of

"Germinal"? I rather doubt it. It seems that I can read that between the lines, and I should perhaps have preferred a more frank discussion of the book. You like me well enough to know that if my nerves cannot support contradiction at first, my common sense as a worker without illusions accepts all criticism. Thus, if I could argue with you, I should pick out two points in your article. The first is the abstraction of the personage, each figure being stiffened—having only one posture. Is that quite true about "Germinal"? I do not think so. The truth is, that this novel is a great fresco. Each chapter, each compartment of the composition was perforce so packed together that everything is seen foreshortened. Thence a constant simplification of the characters. As in my other novels, the characters of secondary importance have had to be sketched in one line. That is my usual process, as well you know, do you not?—a fact which can only surprise those good critics whose eyes have read me for the last twenty years without seeing me.

'But look at the characters of primary importance; each has his proper movement. A workman's brain, that is Etienne's, little by little filled with Socialist ideas; a slow exasperation of suffering urging the woman Maheu away from antique resignation into present revolt; a pitiful slope, down which Catherine rolls to the last degree of pain and suffering.

'In this decorative piece of work I considered that these large movements would sufficiently clearly express my thought, standing out from the crowd. And *à propos* of this, allow me to add that I did not well understand your regret—the idea that I ought to have created individuals, instead of limiting myself to a picture of the crowd. I cannot realise that idea. My subject was the action and reaction reciprocally of the individual and of the crowd, one on the other. How could I have produced that effect if I had created no individual characters?

'The second point is as to my lyrical temperament, my exaggeration of the truth. You know that for a long time past you have not been astonished, as others are, to find in me a poet. I should, however, have liked to see you take to pieces the mechanism of my eye. I exaggerate; that is quite true, but I do not exaggerate as did Balzac, just as Balzac did not exaggerate as did Victor Hugo. The whole point is there: the work proceeds from the conditions of the operation. We all of us lie more or less; but what is the mechanism and what is the quality of our lie? Now—and it is possible that I mistake myself in this—I believe that as far as I am concerned I lie in the direction of truth. I am afflicted with a hypertrophia of what is true in point of detail, springing starwards from the spring-board of observation. Reality soars with a stroke of the wing up to the symbol. There

is much to be said on this point, and I should like to see you spend a day in studying the question.

'I do not believe, as you do, that "Germinal" will have a very big success. What is going on around this book troubles and worries me. It will tire the public. My only pleasure is to feel that, in spite of their fatal restrictions, my friends render justice to the great effort which it cost me. From this point of view your article gave me great pleasure, and I thank you for it from the bottom of my heart. At my age, and in the midst of incessant labour, the only consolation that remains to a man is not to draw over to his side the stupidity of the public; it is not to be diminished in the eyes of those who love him. Thank you, and believe me

'Your very affectionate

'Emile Zola.'

In 'Germinal,' again, Zola shows a spirit of humour which places him in this respect far above any contemporary humorists. What, for instance, could be more laughter-provoking than the description of the character of M. Grégoire, the share-holding millionaire, and his surprise that the miners should object to his living comfortably on the proceeds of their work? His serene and happy egotism is one of the funniest things in French literature, provoking laughter because of its absolute fidelity

to nature. Then, again, there is Jeanlin, the imp who is always occupied; another masterly sketch of human egotism, which by reason of its very fidelity to nature brings a smile to the lips of all who read.

But perhaps what is most striking in 'Germinal,' apart from the wonderful delineation of character, is the grandeur of the style. Here, indeed, is the epic language which Zola longed to write. 'Germinal' is a fictional epic, which some day, perhaps, when the world shall have rid itself of the last taint of romanticism, will be taught to children as is to-day the 'Iliad' or the 'Odyssey.' Who, for instance, can read the following passage, describing the march past of the strikers, without a cold shudder—the cold shudder produced by what is magnificent in art? It is to be found on page 392 of the Charpentier edition:—

'. . . Les femmes avaient paru, près d'un millier de femmes, aux cheveux épars, dépeignés par la course, aux guenilles montrant la peau nue, des nudités de femelles lasses d'enfanter des meurt-de-faim. Quelques-unes tenaient leur petit entre les bras, le soulevaient, l'agitaient, ainsi qu'un drapeau de deuil et de vengeance. Des autres, plus jeunes, avec des gorges gonflées de guerrières, brandissaient des bâtons, tandis que les vieilles, affreuses, hurlaient si fort que les cordes de leurs cous décharnés semblaient rompre. Et les hommes déboulèrent ensuite,

deux mille furieux, des galibots, des haveurs, des raccommodeurs, une masse compacte qui roulait d'un seul bloc, serrée, confondue, au point qu'on ne distinguait ni les culottes déteintes ni les tricots de laine en loques, effacés dans la même uniformité terreuse. Les yeux brûlaient, on voyait seulement les trous des bouches noirs, chantant la "Marseillaise," dont les strophes se perdaient en un mugissement confus, accompagné par le claquement des sabots sur la terre dure. Au-dessus des têtes, parmi le hérissement des barres de fer, une hache passa, portée toute droite, et cette hache unique, qui était comme l'étendard de la bande, avait dans le ciel clair le profil aigu d'un couperet de guillotine.

'. . . C'était la vision rouge de la révolution qui les emporterait tous fatalement, par une soirée sanglante de cette fin de siècle. Oui, un soir, le peuple lâché, débridé, galoperait ainsi sur les chemins, et il ruisselerait du sang des bourgeois, il promènerait des têtes, il sèmerait l'or des coffres éventrés. Les femmes hurleraient, les hommes auraient ces mâchoires de loups, ouvertes pour mordre. Oui, ce seraient ces mêmes guenilles, le même tonnerre des gros sabots, la même cohue effroyable de peau sale, d'haleine empestée, balayant le vieux monde sous leur poussée débordante de barbares. Des incendies flamberaient, on ne laisserait pas débout une pierre des villes, on retournerait

à la vie sauvage des bois, après le grand rut, la grande ripaille où les pauvres, en une nuit, efflanqueraient les femmes et videraient les caves des riches. Il n'y aurait plus rien, plus un sou des fortunes, plus un titre des situations acquises, jusqu'au jour où une nouvelle terre repousserait peut-être. Oui, c'étaient ces choses qui passaient sur la route, comme une force de la nature, et ils en recevaient le vent terrible au visage.

'Un grand cri s'éleva, domina la "Marseillaise :"

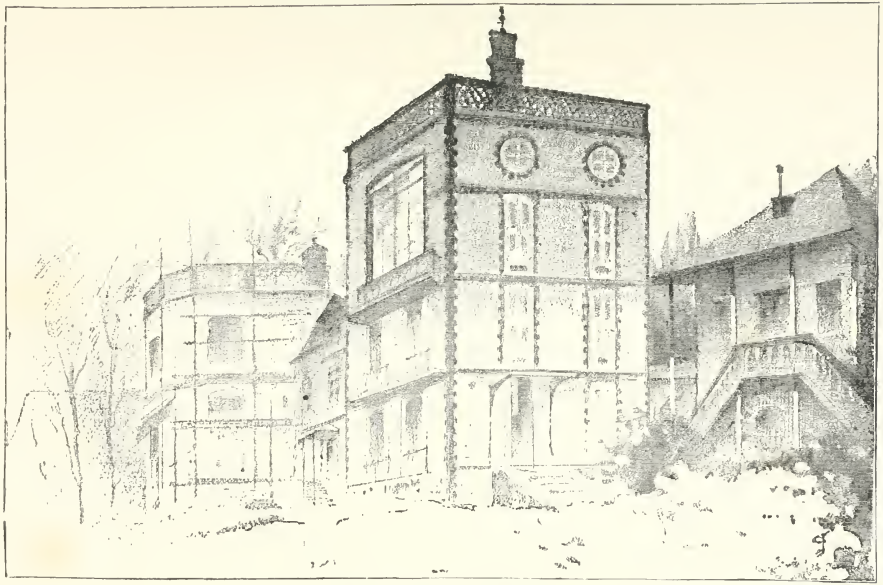
'"Du pain ! du pain ! du pain !"'

Some days ago, shortly after the appearance of 'Doctor Pascal,' a critic, who for many years had been Zola's bitterest opponent, wrote *à propos* of the passage where the little boy dies of a fluxion of blood in the sight of his helpless and paralysed great-grandmother, that these pages were, perhaps, the finest in French literature. There are many passages in 'Germinal,' and one or two in 'L'Assommoir'—notably the description in the first chapter of the passing-by of the workmen on their way to their work—which deserve the same praise.

'Germinal' was to a large extent written at Médan, Zola's country house, to which frequent reference has already been made. It was after his return from L'Estaque, in the autumn of 1877, that Zola determined to buy a little house in the neigh-

bourhood of Paris, where to spend his *villégiature*—not too remote from Paris, because next year was to be the Paris Exhibition of 1878, and he was anxious to be near enough to Paris to be able to visit it. He had heard Triel spoken about as a very pretty place, and went one day to visit it. But Triel did not please him at all. 'I would as soon live in Batignolles,' he said. He then hired a carriage and drove in the direction of Poissy, determined to explore the country in the hopes of finding what he wanted. *En route* he passed by Vernouillet, a little village which consoled him somewhat for the melancholy plains of Triel. The road farther on became quite picturesque. Ten minutes later he found himself in a little village, and a certain house that he saw—a narrow little house hidden in a nest of verdure, and separated from the rest of the hamlet by a magnificent alley of trees—produced upon him what Stendhal has called 'le coup de foudre.' He fell in love with it at first sight. A sign with 'To Sell' dangled outside the gate. Zola did not want to risk buying a house; what he wanted was only to rent one, his native prudence making him hesitate at the expenditure of a large sum of money. But the house was to be sold, and could not be rented, and so, screwing up his courage, he visited his lawyer, and arranged for the purchase of the house at the price of 9,000 francs.

'The little house,' writes Alexis, 'was like a farm, and the garden was no bigger than a pocket handkerchief. Some weeks later the masons, the painters, the upholsterers, had entered it to prepare it for habitation. They have never left it since. The reason is that after they had repaired the little house Zola made them build a new one, a big one this time, suited to his professional requirements, to his taste for comfort, to his one and only passion—work. This second house, it is true, was tenfold that of the original building in cost.'



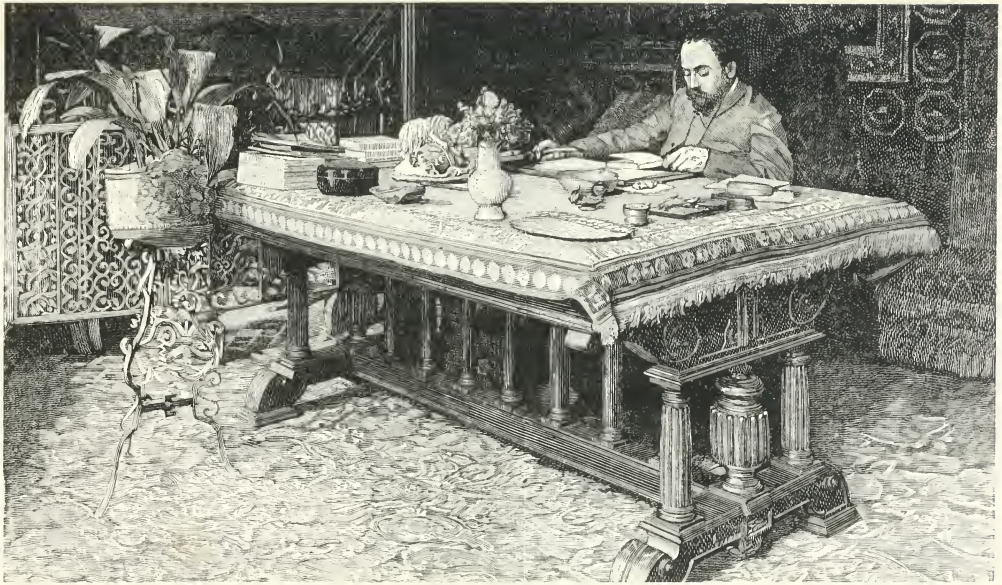
M. Zola's House at Médan.

CHAPTER XVI

LIFE AT MÉDAN—'LA TERRE'—'LE RÊVE'

Zola's life at Médan has always been a very simple one, following without variations of any kind a strict plan. He rises at eight in the morning, and dresses for the country in very rustic attire, his favourite apparel being a suit of brown corduroy velvet, with heavy shooting-boots. Directly after rising he takes a walk with his dogs, amongst which his favourite is a little terrier, a kind of Dandie Dinmont, called Râton, who has a great dislike to strangers in general, and to interviewers in particular. Sometimes Madame Zola joins in these walks, which are never of long duration, and rarely extend beyond a hundred yards on the other side of the bridge over the Seine fronting which the house lies. The house is reached again at a quarter to nine, when the first breakfast is served. The *premier déjeuner* in France usually consists of little beyond a roll and a cup of tea, or chocolate, or coffee. Zola, however, takes no liquids, and, believing in working on a well-

nourished frame, invariably takes a couple of eggs on the plate—that is to say, fried eggs—for breakfast. He is very particular that these eggs should be cooked just to the point at which he likes them, and the comely and buxom cook to whose hands he has entrusted the comforts of the inner man is always very careful about this dish. Friends tell how they have heard Zola scolding the cook for having failed with his breakfast; adding, 'And the consequence is that my morning's work was worth nothing.' At nine, punctual to the minute, Zola goes upstairs to his workroom. This is a huge room, having the dimensions of the studio of a painter of historical subjects. It is over fifteen feet high, twenty-seven feet broad, and thirty in length. At one end is a large fireplace, over the mantel-piece of which is traced in letters of gold the phrase which is Zola's war-cry, 'Nulla dies sine linea.' At the other end is a kind of alcove, entirely taken up with a gigantic divan on which ten people could comfortably take their ease. In the middle of the room is a very large working-table covered with all kinds of writing materials, all arranged in the most methodical order. Opposite the table is a bay window which commands a splendid view of the river. Above the alcove referred to, and reached by a spiral staircase, is a gallery where Zola keeps his books. The same staircase leads to a terrace, which covers the whole of the top of the

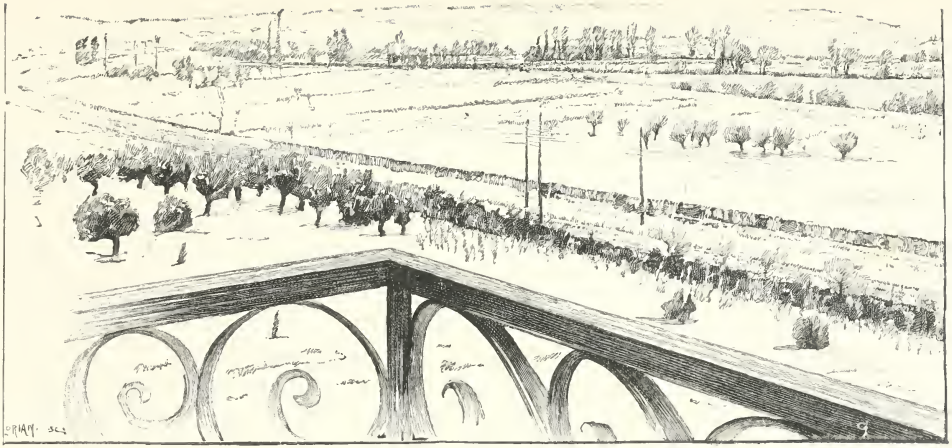


M. Zola at Work.

house, and whence a magnificent view of all the surrounding country can be obtained. At this table, and in front of this view on the Seine, Zola works without tolerating any interruption till one o'clock in the afternoon, producing his daily average of work, and not a line more nor less. At one o'clock punctually lunch is served, and is usually a very elaborate and succulent meal, styling, as he does, *gourmandise* the literature of the palate. At two o'clock, after lunch is over, Zola takes his siesta. At three o'clock the postman arrives with his letters and the newspapers, and Zola has to be awakened to attend to them. Zola receives all the papers published in Paris, almost without exception, and somehow manages to see whatever interests him in any one of them. In his study at Paris may be seen a little table on which his newspapers are methodically arranged. There is never the slightest sign of disorder or untidiness in any room in which Zola lives. As to his letters, he is simply overwhelmed with correspondence from all parts of the world, to the extent, indeed, that he often leaves a huge pile of letters on his table, not having the courage to open them, still less to answer them, for days and days together. He says that he knows of no *corvée* more disagreeable than having to answer letters. It is his principle that a man ought to answer his correspondents, because it is discourteous not to do so,

so that each time he receives a letter which seems to be sensible and not utterly frivolous, he usually sends off a few lines in answer. 'But,' he said the other day, in speaking about this duty, 'it is a very hard obligation on me. You can imagine that in the winter, for instance, when I come home in the afternoons after running about making visits and seeing people, I am hardly tempted to sit down to my table to write. And as I have no secretary, for it would take me much too long to explain to another what I can do myself, I let the letters accumulate on my table, till the day comes when I gird my loins up bravely, and rid myself of all my arrears of correspondence at a single stroke.'

Speaking about the letters he receives, Zola said: 'A great number of young people write to me—in fact, the youthful element predominates in my mail-bag. A number of young people write to me to ask me for advice, and whenever I am able to do so to good purpose I send off a few words in reply. To those who write to me to express sympathy or to testify to their devotion to me, I answer simply with the words "Thank you" on my visiting-card. All those letters do not take up much time, but what I dread is the letter of the gentleman who sends me a long series of questions to answer, and who does not seem to know that an author's time is taken up by exact daily duties. I equally dread the people who



The Country around Médan, seen from the Balcony.

ask for a word of recommendation, and who send certificates and other documents which one is obliged to return. Just the same as with the people who send you manuscripts—another pest. I remember a woman who had sent me a huge packet of manuscript which unfortunately got lost, and who went so far as to threaten to come upstairs with a policeman to find it again. As to the people who enclose stamps by way of forcing you to answer them, I never allow myself to be influenced by this precautionary appeal to my honesty, because I cannot admit that a stranger should trouble a person for three-halfpence. Nor have I any scruple in using the stamps so sent me for other purposes, when I do not judge proper to answer the sender thereof. Sometimes in tearing up the letter the stamp gets lost, but if it is found and placed in my stamp-box I have not the slightest scruple in using it. I receive a great number of applications for money. I remember a day or two ago receiving a letter from a woman whom I did not know, who asked me to pay off all the debts of her late husband. What could I answer to that? As to small charities which have to be distributed, it is Madame Zola who attends to that.'

The legend of Zola's great egotism is as untrue as are most of the stories current about him. I could cite many instances of his kindness of heart; a single example, of recent occurrence, will suffice.

Some time ago he received from Mazas, the prison in which prisoners under remand are detained in Paris, a letter from a student who was confined there under the grave charge of breaking official seals with a view to burglary. It is true that the burglary intended was a most praiseworthy one, the object of the prisoner and of his associate being to lay hands on certain papers compromising to the Russian Socialists, which had been left in the room by its tenant, a Russian student, who had committed suicide, and whose papers had been impounded by the Russian authorities with a very obvious purpose. Zimmer, such was the name of the student, had determined to get hold of these papers, and thus to save his fellow-Socialists in Russia, at any cost, but had failed in the attempt, and lay awaiting trial at Mazas. Finding the time long, he wrote to Zola and told him that he was dreadfully bored in gaol, and that he would like to have some of Zola's books to read. The next morning a large packet was delivered at the prison *greffe* for prisoner So-and-so. It contained the whole of Zola's works, with an amiable inscription, and accompanied by a letter from their author bidding the young man be of good heart and courage.

Zola's mail-bag contains a quantity of letters weekly in which people propose collaboration with him. 'Many,' he says, 'express a desire to tell the

story of their lives in a book, and I have noticed that the majority of them give no address beyond that of *poste restante*. This always awakens my suspicion, and I don't answer, just as I never receive a stranger unless I see his address at the corner of his card.'

Zola paid rather dearly a short time ago for having omitted to follow, under exceptional circumstances, this very prudent rule of his. It was when he received a certain person, who described himself as coming from some provincial paper, and who took advantage of a few minutes' waiting in the author's drawing-room to steal a very valuable clock and other articles of value.

Zola is pestered with letters from women, and it may be stated at once that he has a very low opinion of women who write letters to authors whom they do not know. In his own words: 'The women who write? They are all old and ugly, lazy creatures who do not love their husbands and their children, and who do not know what to do with themselves. Have they nothing better to do than to write to a gentleman whom they do not know? Bores, with a vague feeling in their minds. . . . Some have gone so far as to call upon me; but I always keep away from them, for they are terrible. One cannot get rid of them. They weep. Youth and beauty, on the contrary, touch me, and I have sometimes answered

letters which had an air of sincerity, a freshness of youth which touched me. I remember some letters to which I wrote an answer. One was from a young girl, who told me that her parents forbade her to read my books, but that she had procured "Le Rêve" and had read it, and admired me. Apart from that, I have never attached any importance to letters from women, and do not think that I have answered more than four in my life. I remember, amongst others, a woman who pursued me for years to make me marry her. She had sent me her photograph. The face was not pretty, but strange-looking. She worried me for a long time, but ceased suddenly to importune me when she learned that I was married. Another time I asked Alexis to keep an appointment given me by another correspondent who had pestered me for a meeting. I do not know what was the result of it. And there are old madwomen, old cranks! I have been receiving letters for the past ten years from one old lady who mistakes me for a priest who has retired from holy orders. She writes me badly-spelt letters, and calls me her "well-beloved Emile," and, in spite of my silence, does not tire of expressing her tenderness. Anonymous letters? I do not receive many of these now, nor have I for the past six years. But I remember that when I was living in the rue Ballu, at the time of "L'Assommoir," of "Nana," and of "Germinal,"

I used to receive letters of most violent abuse—filthy letters, some containing enclosures of the most disgusting kind. It was threatened that my hash would be settled for me at the corner of some street. It was an outburst of exasperated and stupid anger, which, however, never produced the slightest impression upon me. . . . To-day it has calmed down, though after the publication of "La Débâcle" I received some insults, notably on postcards coming from Germany.'

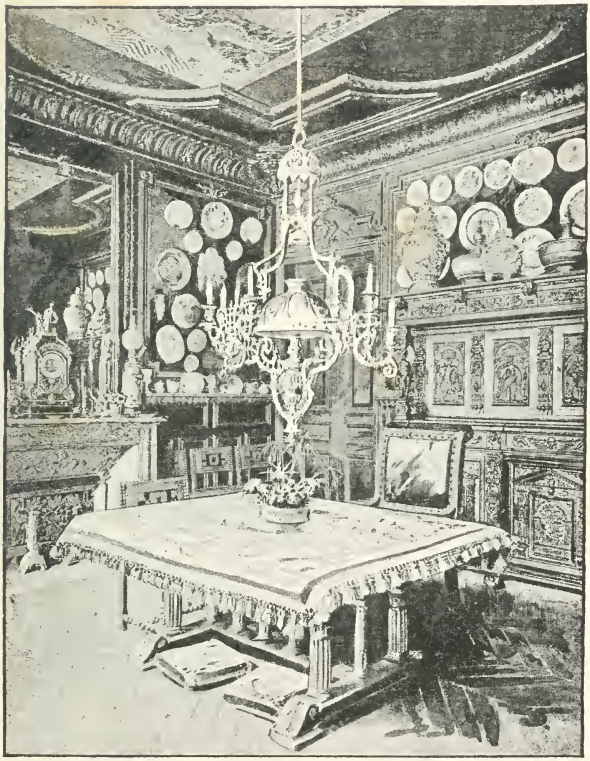
It may be added, in conclusion to this description of Zola's letter-bag, that a great number of priests write to him, many to make confession to the author, whom they seem to consider a brother in holy orders, by reason of his profound knowledge of the human heart.

At four o'clock in the afternoons at Médan Zola has finished with his letters, and then, unless there be some very important proofs to be corrected, the author takes one of his boats and rows on the Seine, landing at a little island opposite his house, which is his property, and on which he has constructed a *châlet*, where the time before dinner is spent in chatting and reading, or in absolute repose under the trees. If the weather be not too hot, Zola takes a ride on his bicycle—a 'safety,' which he recently bought with a view to combating a return of the obesity which he had successfully overcome by means

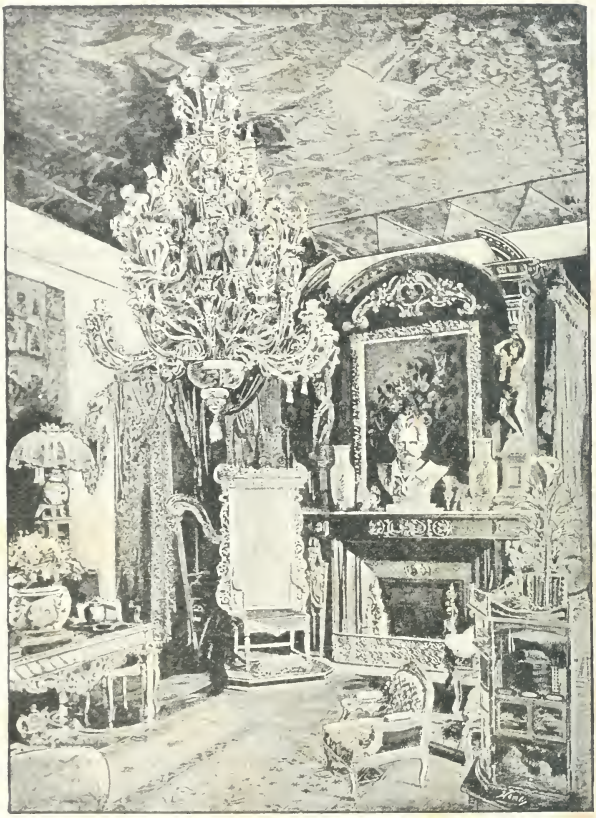
of the Schveninger cure—that is to say, by abstaining from all liquid at meals. Dinner is served at half-past seven. Tea is served after dinner, and then, perhaps, a game of billiards is played. Zola is very fond of this game, and quite recently has transformed his dining-room in the house in the rue de Bruxelles into a billiard-room, building a new wing to the house to contain the kitchen and the dining-room. At ten o'clock punctually Zola goes upstairs to his room, but not to sleep, spending hours in reading, and rarely getting to sleep before two o'clock in the morning.

It was at Médan, living in the way described, that Zola wrote his next novel, 'L'Œuvre,' which is of especial interest to the admirers of this author by reason of the fact that in Sandoz Zola gives a portrait by himself of himself. In a letter from Mont Dore, where he and his wife went to spend the summer of that year (1885) he writes about 'L'Œuvre:—' . . . I have signed my agreement for the publication in serial form of "L'Œuvre" with the "Gil Blas," the "Figaro" really frightening me. I could see its readers yawning with *ennui* over this book of pure artistic and passionate psychology.'

'L'Œuvre,' which has not been one of the most successful of the series, and which is especially criticised by the painters, was finished on the morning of February 23, 1886.



M. Zola's Dining Room.



M. Zola's Drawing Room.

'I only finished "L'Œuvre" this morning,' he writes from Médan under that date. 'This novel, in which my souvenirs and my heart have overflowed, has grown to an unexpected length. It will make seventy-five or eighty *feuilletons* in the "Gil Blas." But now I am delivered from it, and I am very happy, and, what is more, I am very pleased with the way it ends. We shall not return to Paris before March 10. I have to look after the workmen here, and besides, I want to finish with the proofs of "L'Œuvre" whilst my mind is at rest. In addition, I will admit that, apart from my few friends, Paris does not tempt me, all the less that I have no notes to take there this time. I am already bitten by my novel on the peasants. It is working me. I am going to set to work at once to collect my notes and to fix upon the plan of the book. I want to give myself up to it entirely.'

The book referred to in this letter was 'La Terre,' the subject of which, it will be remembered, had long tempted Zola. It may be said at once that it was one of the most successful of the series, and is described as one of the four pillars—'L'Assommoir,' 'Germinal,' and 'La Débâcle' being the other three—on which the glory of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series rests. It is also the book about which Zola has been most blamed for deliberate pornography, and it is certainly a matter of fact that there are many passages in it which never can be approved by Anglo-Saxon readers. But it

happens that Zola does not write for Anglo-Saxon readers, and does not care one snap of the fingers for opinions other than those of his countrymen, if, indeed, he cares for any man's opinion. And it must also be remembered that the delight in a certain kind of coarseness is a trait of French character, just as in England under Elizabeth, and even later, it was a trait of English character—a trait which the French inherit from the Gauls their ancestors; a fact so well recognised that pleasantries concerning the baser functions of the body are described as of 'Gallic salt.' There are in Paris to-day, holding high social positions, saluted as masters of the craft and enjoying wide popularity, men who, were they to write in London as they write daily in Paris, would be in a very short time in prison under heavy sentences of penal servitude. Zola has often expressed himself surprised at the criticism or blame of pornography brought against him for writing 'La Terre,' and maintains that the passages commented upon belong, where they are not faithful descriptions of life amongst the peasants, to the best traditions of French humour.

'La Terre,' like all Zola's books, was very carefully prepared. The following is a letter which he wrote from Châteaudun on May 6, 1886, and which shows him at work gathering materials for his novel: 'After a day more or less wasted at Chartres,' he writes, 'I have been here [Châteaudun] since

yesterday, and I have found the spot that I need. It is a little valley, four leagues hence, in the canton of Cloyes, between the Perche and the Beauce, situated on the frontier of the latter. I shall put a little brook in it, which will flow into the Loir—such a brook, by the way, exists. I shall have there all that I stand in need of—small and big farms, a central spot thoroughly French, a typical horizon very characteristic, a gay people who speak *patois*—in short, what I had always hoped for. And I write to you at once because you were good enough to be interested in my research. I return to-morrow to Cloyes, and shall go from there to visit my valley in detail and my bit of Beauce frontier. The day after to-morrow I have rendezvous with a farmer who lives about three leagues from here, in Beauce, and shall visit his farm in detail. I shall learn all about farming on big farms there. To-day I stayed at Châteaudun, to be present at a big cattle market. All this will take up some days, but I shall get back with all my documents, ready to set to work. *Et voilà.* Magnificent weather and a charming country. I do not speak of Beauce, but of the banks of the Loir.'

He was back at Médan in June, with his documents ready. On the 16th he writes: '. . . I have set myself somehow or other to the writing of my book. The first chapter is finished. The book

promises well, but is without that sublimity which my cursed head will always dream of.'

The writing of this novel, which was so vigorously denounced by the English critics and Pharisees at the time of the scandalous prosecution of Mr. Vizetelly, as a work of mere pornography, written with no other object than that of lucre, occupied Zola more than a year, without counting the time spent in collecting the materials for this very true and faithful study of life amongst the peasants of the centre of France. On May 26, 1887, he writes from Médan: '. . . We are working too hard, my wife in organising, in superintending this rascally big house of ours, I in "swotting" till two o'clock in the morning over my sentences, to try and force them to say things which they won't say according to my idea and to my satisfaction.'

A hurriedly written note, dated August 19, 1887, announces: 'I have finished "La Terre" this morning.' It reads like the cry of a schoolboy let out to play after a long and disagreeable task. But Zola was already at work, in thought, at least, on the next book of the series, 'Le Rêve,' in which his poetic nature was for once to have full play, and in which the author condemned as a vulgar pornograph was to prove himself, as he had already done both in 'La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret' and in 'Une Page d'Amour,' the most delicate of artists, a man enamoured of

what is beautiful and refined and precious. 'Le Rêve' is in the eyes of many people the most beautiful book that has been written in France during the whole of the nineteenth century. The documentation of 'Le Rêve' took place in Paris. One of Zola's first preparations for this work was to buy a very costly Missal, for which he paid several hundred pounds; the description of which Missal can be found in the novel. Many weeks were spent at the National Library consulting works on matters architectural and ecclesiastical. That excellent architect, himself a novelist of no mean order, M. Frantz Jourdain, was able to assist Zola to a great extent with information on ecclesiastical architecture, and supplied his friend with quantities of valuable notes.

In November 1887 we find Zola hard at work getting his materials together. On the 23rd of that month he writes to a friend:—

'Thank you, my dear friend, for your notes. Doubtless, I shall go to the National Library to consult the books you have indicated. The house—a small house of two storeys, and three windows frontage—must be of the end of the sixteenth century. Tell me of some poor street in Paris which was built at that epoch. Something else: Have you no friend who could draw up the coat-of-arms of my characters, the lords of Hautecœur? They are of very old nobility. Many died during the Crusades. I want

something crest-waving, sonorous, but not too complicated.'

Again, in December of the same year:—

'I did not give you the exact title of Saint-Aubin's book.' [This was a work entitled 'L'Art du Brodeur.'] 'Try and find out if it can be purchased, and what would be its price. Something else: I want a whole litany of titles for my lords of Hautecœur. They are dukes of something or other, and counts besides—all that one can wish for. I want a very sonorous enumeration of titles. It would be best to copy it out of some heraldic book, so that it should not appear to have been invented. One ought to be able to find what I want at the Carnavalet Museum.

'Thank you and yours cordially.

'EMILE ZOLA.'

Towards the end of December of that year he had been supplied with the coat-of-arms that he desired. He writes that he is well pleased with those that have been submitted, but that perhaps a slight modification will be requisite, and adds that he has made up his mind about the house that he proposes to describe in his book.

The writing of 'Le Rêve' occupied him in Paris and at Médan till August. In the course of this month his friend Henri Céard wrote to him to point out an error that he had made in a certain technical

detail. 'Thank you for your remark, my dear friend,' he writes from Médan, under date August 19, 1888. 'It is quite a just one. And the worst of it is that I knew all along that bishops do not wear a violet *soutane*. How did that violet *soutane* creep into the book, I wonder? No doubt owing to my stupid love for colour. I shall only finish my novel the day after to-morrow. The last chapter is giving me very much trouble on account of the technical details of the ritual. Ah! what a good sigh of relief I shall give vent to when I have done with it!' A note dated August 21 announces, 'Finished "Le Rêve" yesterday. Delighted.'

CHAPTER XVII

ZOLA AS A DRAMATIST

It is not given to any man to have in full his heart's desire, and though, no doubt, M. Zola does not consider that he has a very great grievance against life, he has been unable to realise one ambition of his which lay very close to his heart. He has always desired—or, rather, had always desired, for I fancy that he has now abandoned this hope—to become a successful dramatic writer—a hope which has not been realised, except, perhaps, in the case of 'L'Assommoir,' which in France under that name, and in the English-speaking countries under the name of 'Drink,' has been a very great money success, if little else. Ill-luck appears to have been against Zola in his theatrical enterprises. Thus it may be said that 'Thérèse Raquin' has never had, in France, at least, the hearing that a piece of this importance in point of originality most certainly merited. It was first played on July 11, 1873, at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, the manager of which was at that

time a M. Hostein, who, although a man of taste, was not, unfortunately for Emile Zola and 'Thérèse Raquin,' a man of capital. Zola had been advised by all his friends not to dramatise his terrible novel. The public would not sit it out, they predicted. It was written at Marseilles during the siege of Paris, and was originally a piece in five acts. The fifth act and part of the fourth were suppressed at M. Hostein's request, he pointing out that in its original form it was much too long. Hostein, at the time when Zola brought him the piece, had just had a most disastrous season, having mounted failure after failure in his endeavour to compete with the neighbouring theatres of the Porte St. Martin and of the Gymnase. Marie Laurent, one of the best drama-actresses in France, took the part of Madame Raquin, regretting that she was not ten years younger, so as to be able to take the part of Thérèse and 'make all Paris run.' Her acceptance of the *rôle* was what decided Hostein, after a certain amount of hesitation, to mount the piece. The *première* took place before a crowded and representative house, the critics being present to a man. A certain hostility manifested itself from the beginning. Little cries of horror and of feigned disgust were heard in various parts of the house; Sarcey was overheard saying during one of the acts, 'I am ill. This Zola makes me positively ill.' Towards the beginning of the third act it was

really thought by Zola and his friends that the piece would not be heard out; but suddenly the opinion of the public seemed to change, and the evening finished with what appeared to be a triumph for the author. The critics had not, however, been won over, and the notices next morning were very unfavourable. In addition to this, the weather was tropical that summer in Paris, the theatres were but little patronised by the public, and 'Thérèse Raquin' failed to draw. After nine performances before almost empty houses, the piece was withdrawn simultaneously with the closing of the theatre. When the Renaissance re-opened in the winter it was to play operetta. There was no question of a revival of 'Thérèse Raquin.' It has only been played once or twice since in Paris, on special occasions; Zola having declared that he will not allow it to be played until he can find an actress able to play the part of Thérèse Raquin, for he attributes the original failure of his piece to the indifferent manner in which this *rôle* was played at the original performances of the piece. He told me when the piece was given in London that the only actress living in France to whom he would confide the *rôle* was Madame Sarah Bernhardt. I suggested Madame Réjane, but he said that he did not think she was suited to the part.

In the following year—that is to say, in 1874—Zola's three-act comedy, 'Les Héritiers Rabourdin,'

was played for the first time at the Théâtre Cluny. This time the weather was favourable. The theatre, however, was one of the third order, with a troupe of actors to match, and the play had hardly a fair chance. It is but just to say that the manager of the theatre, M. Camille Weinschenk, did his best to mount the piece in a suitable manner. The troupe of actors, however, who performed it—with the exception, perhaps, of Mdlle. Charlotte Reynard, who took the part of Charlotte in the piece—was a very mediocre one. The part of Rabourdin, which demanded an actor of very superior talent, was feebly interpreted by an old actor called Mercier. The worst-acted part was, however, that of Chapuzot, an octogenarian, which was lamentably played by quite a young man called Olona, who had the best intentions in the world without having the necessary capacities for executing them. The piece, though very badly played, was not hooted off the stage. The first night might almost be described as a success, but the critics were even more severe upon the 'Héritiers Rabourdin' than they had been upon 'Thérèse Raquin.' Some were cruel enough to say, 'Why do you not give us another "Thérèse Raquin"?' forgetful of the fact that they themselves, with their adverse criticisms, had contributed largely to the failure of the latter play. The piece was only played seventeen nights. On two or three

nights—that is to say, on Sundays—it made money, but the other nights were what are called 'frosts.' And it is a notable fact that what money was made by the 'Héritiers Rabourdin' was contributed by the inhabitants of the Cluny Quarter, who seemed to understand the author's points, and who laughed and applauded heartily. Flaubert was present at the first night of this luckless piece, and, as usual at the *premières* of his friends, was most enthusiastic. People who were present can remember how he stood up in his seat and cried out: 'How fine that is! that is really superb!' applauding with frenzy, and, in order to make more noise, thumping the ground with his stick.

Zola's next piece was the famous 'Bouton de Rose.' It was played at the Palais Royal, under the auspices of M. Plunkett, who had refused 'Les Héritiers Rabourdin,' and whose acquaintance Zola had made on that occasion. It was M. Plunkett himself who commissioned Zola to write the play for him, after having mounted several failures and lost no inconsiderable amount of money. Zola decided upon a farce, and at the end of the year 1876 handed the manuscript of 'Bouton de Rose' to M. Plunkett. Plunkett was not at all satisfied with the piece, and, after reading it, wrote Zola a long letter in which he advanced all sorts of reasons against its chance of success. Zola was, however,

able to carry the day, got an appointment for reading the piece, distributed the *rôles*, and commenced the rehearsals. The summer intervening, the *première* had to be put off. Zola went to Estaque, where he wrote 'Une Page d'Amour,' and it was after his return to Paris that 'Bouton de Rose' was played—this time against his will. As a matter of fact, during his absence 'L'Assommoir' had been played, and had been a great artistic and financial success, and Zola stood very high in the dramatic market. He, on the other hand, did not care any longer for the production of a piece which he had written to order, and which was by no means representative of his dramatic talents. M. Plunkett had to threaten him with legal proceedings before he agreed to the production of the piece, whilst at the same time he was no doubt greatly influenced by the advice of his friend M. Dormeuil, who was one of the directors of the Palais Royal Theatre. The piece was a complete failure, and the curtain fell amidst the howls of the public, who drowned with their objurgations the voice of Geoffroy, the actor, trying to announce the name of the author. Zola was behind the scenes, and, hearing the echoes of his defeat, turned to the directors and said: 'You see, gentlemen, that you did wrong to mount my piece against my will.'

An hour later, Zola supped with robust appetite

at the neighbouring restaurant of Véfour. There were present M. and Mme. Alphonse Daudet, De Goncourt, Charpentier the publisher, Mme. Charpentier senior, M. and Mme. Eugène Champrosier, Henri Céard, Guy de Maupassant, Paul Alexis, Huysmans, Dethez, Marius Roux, Manet, Guillemet, Béliard, Coste, and other guests—thirty in all. Flaubert was in high spirits, and this supper, which may be described as the funeral repast of 'Bouton de Rose,' which was never played again, was anything but a sad one.

'Germinal,' an adaptation of his novel of that name, was Zola's next dramatic attempt. It was, however, stopped by the Censure as likely to excite revolutionary feelings, and must, therefore, also be classed with Zola's failures. One of the bitterest articles that Zola ever set his signature to was one which, published in the 'Figaro,' related his experiences with the authorities over 'Germinal.'

Zola's dramatic opinions will be familiar to all those who have read his articles of dramatic criticism published in book form after publication in the 'Bien Public' and the 'Voltaire.' 'Zola,' says Paul Alexis, 'desires to do for the stage what Stendhal, Flaubert, and Balzac did for the novel.' His dream is to realise himself this same evolution, which, according to him, has only been faintly indicated by Dumas *fils*, Augier, Sardou, Meilhac, and Halévy.

What he long desired was to produce a kind of contemporary 'Phèdre'—the 'Phèdre' of naturalism—at the first night of which the battle of naturalism on the stage should be fought, just as that of romanticism was fought on the memorable first night of 'Hernani.'

A few years ago Zola used to say that as soon as the 'Rougon-Macquart' series was finished he should set himself seriously to work at writing for the stage; that as long as he had that task—i.e. the completion of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series—before him he could not give the necessary time and attention to the stage. But he seems to have at last relinquished this ambition of his to excel as a dramatic writer; for now that the 'Rougon-Macquart' series is finished, instead of devoting himself to writing for the stage, he has decided upon the writing of three more novels, which will take him at least another three years. The fact of the matter is, that Zola seems to have recognised that if naturalism is to be preached from the stage at all, he is not the man to preach it—an admission which very many successful novelists have had to make for themselves; the art of writing for the stage being a very different one from that which constitutes a successful novelist.

His failure as a dramatic writer has been complete. 'L'Assommoir' certainly has made a large sum of money, and can be classed as a success; but

it is not a success of which Zola is proud, for he himself is the first to admit that it is to his collaborator, M. William Busnach, the success is due, and that 'L'Assommoir' as a play is something quite different in purport and intent from the novel from which it was drawn. The seven or eight plays, apart from 'L'Assommoir' and including 'Nana,' adapted from his novel of that name, have not altogether totalled one hundred representations.

CHAPTER XVIII

'LA BÊTE HUMAINE'—'L'ARGENT'—'LA DÉBÂCLE'—'LE DOCTEUR PASCAL.'

Zola for years had determined that one of the novels of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series should deal with life on the railway, and often from the terrace of his house at Médan, from which he could see the trains on the neighbouring branch of the Western Railway, he had repeated that a great novel could be written on so modern and so vital a subject. It was not, however, until he really decided upon writing the book—that is to say, it was not until it seemed to him that the time for writing the projected novel about railway life had come—that he determined to work into the story in the person of his hero another scientific problem which considerably interested him, and which was to maintain his claim that the 'Rougon-Macquart' series were not merely stories, but works of scientific interest. It is this pretension, perhaps, which will most expose the series to the criticism of posterity, and the books

may be condemned as scientific studies where they would triumph as works of fiction. Zola is, however, in great earnest in this pretension of his, and, as he himself has declared, he certainly knows whatever is to be known on the subjects which he has dealt with. The homicidal mania which is the leading trait in the character of the hero of 'La Bête Humaine' was most carefully studied by him, and for weeks his table was covered with handbooks on the subject, such as have been written by Lombroso, Maudsley, and other specialists. The technicalities of railway life and work were more easily obtained, but none the less conscientiously investigated and noted. More than once Zola might have been seen steaming out of the Western station of Paris side by side with engine-driver and stoker on the platform of the engine of some express train, note-book in hand, and eyes and ears wide open. 'La Bête Humaine' took over a year in the writing, for, its preparation having been commenced after 'Le Rêve' was finished, it was not terminated until the spring of 1890. It is considered an admirable picture of railway life, and many of the passages—notably the wreck of the express train, and the glorious last pages, in which the passage of the runaway and driverless train, filled with drunken and howling soldiers, is described—are considered as good as any that the Master has written. The analysis of homi-

cidal mania is, perhaps, less appreciated, possibly because very few novel-readers are properly equipped for the comprehension of so abstruse and mysterious a subject. The book was published in serial form in the 'Gil Blas,' and was rather handicapped at the outset by the fact that its publication *en feuilleton* in this paper was announced by means of posters which were nothing less than outrageously indecent. Zola was obliged to threaten to withdraw his manuscript before these posters—which, moreover, had attracted the attention of the police—were removed and replaced. They compared very unfavourably indeed with those which had been prepared for the advertisement of 'La Terre' by no less a man than Chéret, the master of the modern *affiche*, and which are considered by the amateurs who collect Chéret's *affiches* as his very best work.

In 'La Bête Humaine' Zola shows himself still a poet, and not untainted with romanticism, against which he had fought so long. The passages in which the steam-engine is symbolised as a living thing, and where the driver is described as in love with his machine as with a woman, are pure romanticism, and in this respect aroused the ire of the pure naturalists.

There was, however, to be very little romanticism in Zola's next book, which, dealing with life on the Stock Exchange, was published under the title of

'L'Argent.' This book gave Zola an immensity of trouble. I remember meeting him one day whilst the book was in preparation, and his telling me that he was much disappointed with what he had collected in the way of material; adding, that he had expected to find much that was most interesting in this world of finance, but that so far his expectations had not been realised. Later on, however, he declared that he was satisfied with his materials, and he has since expressed himself as very well pleased with 'L'Argent' as a whole. A characteristic little note, written by him from Médan, *à propos* of 'L'Argent,' on May 31, 1889, is before me: '. . . I am back here again, and have to set to work furiously. Ah! age does not calm me. I hoped as I grew older to grow calmer. But decidedly I can only act under the influence of passion. Is it not strange? For at the bottom of my heart I judge myself very coldly, and I even despise my enthusiasm.'

A still more characteristic note, on the same subject, is dated from Médan, June 16, 1890. '. . . Thank you,' he writes, 'for the notes on the St. Lazare, of which I shall take advantage. . . . This morning, at last, I wrote the first four pages of "L'Argent." Now I have only to do the same amount of pages every morning for six or seven months.' This letter speaks more for his industry and perseverance than a whole handbook of eulogy.

The greater part of the year 1891 was spent in collecting materials for 'La Débâcle,' which was to be the next of the series. In this case, however, it was not the lack, but rather the superabundance of material, that rendered the task a difficult one. 'When I began upon this book,' said Zola, in a conversation with me some weeks before it was finished, 'I had no conception of the immensity of the task I had laid upon myself. The labour of reading up all that has been written on the subject in general, and on the battle of Sedan in particular, has been enormous, and the work of condensation of all that I have read has been all the more laborious because on no subject has more divergence of opinion been expressed. You see that revolving bookcase on your left hand, crammed with books and pamphlets; you see that Boule *commode*, with its overflowing drawers crammed with newspapers and manuscripts; you see those *dossiers* on my writing-table?—all that is material that I have had to digest. I have read all that has been written about the battle of Sedan, as well as about the unhappy adventures of the luckless Seventh Corps d'Armée, in which is placed the imaginary regiment which plays the leading *rôle* in my novel. And the digestion has not been an easy task. Each general, for instance, has a different version to give of the why and the wherefore of the defeat. Each claims to have had a plan

which, if it had been followed, would have averted the disaster. Another difficulty has been that I took no part in that campaign, not having been a soldier, and that for my information on the life and experiences of a soldier I have had to depend on outside testimony, often of a conflicting nature.'

Zola, as the only son of a widow, was dispensed from military service during the war. It will be remembered that during its progress he was in the South busily engaged in literary and journalistic work, and narrowly escaped being nominated a sub-prefect at Castel-Sarrazin, the Government needing a clever pen for the drawing-up of its proclamations.

Zola was greatly helped, as soon as it became known that he was engaged on a novel dealing with the war and with Sedan, by people in all parts of France. On the occasion referred to he showed me a quantity of letters and manuscript accounts written by people who had been present at the battle, and sent to him to make any use of that he thought fit. 'That is excellent material,' he remarked; 'indeed, the best, because it is not to be found anywhere else. See here: "Anecdotal Account of the battle of Sedan," sent me by a gentleman who is now professor at one of the universities in the South of France. And look at this long, ill-spelt letter, which comes to me from a gamekeeper in the North, in which he gives me a full account of the battle as it

impressed him—he served as a private soldier in the Seventh Corps d'Armée. I have masses of such documents, and it was my duty to go through everything that could throw any light on my subject. My labour has been one of reconciliation of divergent statements in the first place, and of condensation in the second. I had to reduce to one page what I could easily and without prolixity have treated in a dozen pages, so that with each page, nay, with each sentence, I have been confronted with the question what to leave out and what to say. Then, when each page was written, I began to torture myself with the doubt whether I had left unsaid things that I ought to have said; whether I had sacrificed good to inferior material.'

In the course of the same conversation, M. Zola again claimed for this novel also that it was a work of scientific interest, describing 'La Débâcle' as a document on the psychology of France in 1870, in the form of a very precise and accurate relation of a series of historical facts, or, in other words, in the form of a realistic historical novel. This, he said, accounted for the enormous number of characters in the book, each character representing one *état d'âme psychologique* of the France of that period. 'If my work be well done,' he added, 'the reader will be able to understand what was in men's minds, and what was the bent of the thoughts of men; what they thought, and how they thought at that period.'

Zola chose the battle of Sedan for the finale of his series, in spite of the fact that the brusque termination of the Second Empire upset the original plan of his novels, forcing him to crowd into a very short period acts and developments of character which should have extended over a much longer time. But he had to remain faithful to his original intention of devoting the series to the description of life under the Second Empire, and to close the series with the close of the Empire. Whilst he was writing 'Le Docteur Pascal,' I on one occasion asked him whether this book would contain any explanation of the many chronological errors which every reader of the series has noticed, and which were commented upon in 'La Nouvelle Revue' by Madame Adam, who pointed out that the characters of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series in general, and 'Nana' in particular, accomplish in the same epoch, and in a very few years only, what reasonably and in actual life would take much longer. To this Zola answered that he admitted this critique, and could not help it. When he began his work on this series—that is to say, in 1868—and began his first researches on atavism, the Second Empire was in full prosperity, and he could not foresee its downfall. 'I thought that it would last, and the ages of my different characters had been fixed with the thought that the Empire would last, so that I could develop them in some sort with my own life.

As it happened, many of them had to break their noses against 1870. Thus Nana dies at the age of twenty-one, when by rights she should have lived to be thirty, and, indeed, acts and experiences what it is difficult to conceive in the short period of life allotted to her. But my series had to be comprised between the Coup d'Etat, as a sort of glorious dawn of an epoch, and Sedan, the downfall of that epoch in fire and blood. . . . The limits of that epoch were clean-cut as with a knife, and I could not allow any over-stepping of them. I preferred to make chronological errors to sacrificing the fine finale of 1870, which I obtained in "La Débâcle."'

May of 1891 was spent, the documents having been digested, in a visit to the scene of the war. As Zola himself relates: 'Having written out the rough draft of the book, it became necessary to see the places, to study the geography of the book, for at that period I did not know where my scenes were to be laid, on the banks of the Rhine, or elsewhere. So with my rough draft in my pocket, and with my head teeming with the shadows of my marionettes, and of the things that they were to do and to explain, I set out for Rheims, and went carefully over the whole ground, driving from Rheims to Sedan, and following foot by foot the road by which the Seventh Corps d'Armée—already then decided upon as the *milieu* in which my novel was to be developed—marched to

their disaster. During that drive I picked up an immense quantity of material, halting in farmhouses and in peasants' cottages, and taking copious notes. Then came Sedan, and after a careful study of the place and the people I saw that my novel must deal largely, for the full comprehension of the story, not only with the locality but with the people of the town. This gave me the *bourgeois* of Sedan, who play an important part in my tale. Little by little the geography gave me also the physiology of my book. Each new place that it became necessary to describe supplied its types, its characters. So on my return to Paris I was in an immense workshop or yard, surrounded with huge mountains of hewn stones, mortar, and bricks, and all that remained then to do was to build the best structure that I could from these materials.'

'La Débâcle' gave Zola immense trouble. I saw him frequently during its progress, and he each time told me that none of his books had ever cost him such pains. He speaks of 'my terrible book' in a letter dated Médan, July 8, 1891. 'I am working violently here,' he writes, 'to begin upon my terrible book; and I think that, all the documents being almost digested, I shall be able to set about writing it in a few days.'

The immense success of this remarkable book exceeded that of all the previous novels of the series. The 180th edition was the other day on

sale in Paris, and fresh editions are in readiness to meet the demand. The publication of 'La Débâcle' in book form was quite a national event, and created a sensation all over Europe.

Zola had, however, hardly finished with the last proofs of this book when he was preparing for the next, which was to be a kind of epilogue or apology for the whole series. This was 'Le Docteur Pascal.' For this little documentation was needed, and for once Zola confessed that he took a real pleasure in writing it. 'I am quite happy in my work on "Le Docteur Pascal,"' he said to me in the course of a conversation. 'It amuses me. I don't suppose that the public in England will understand this; but it amuses me because in it I am able to defend myself against all the accusations that have been brought against me. Pascal's work on the members of the family is in small what I have attempted to do on humanity—to show all, so that all may be cured. It is not a book which, like "La Débâcle," will stir the passions of the mob. It is a scientific work, the logical deduction and conclusion of all my preceding volumes; and, at the same time, it is my speech for the defence before the court of public opinion of all that I have done. It is the revendication of the work that, commenced twenty-four—nay, twenty-five—years ago, is now so near to its end. That circumstance, by the way, is another thing which gives

me cause to be glad. I have done—or, rather, in another month shall have done—what I determined to do, and it is not given to all authors to carry out to the very end a plan of the magnitude of mine. But perhaps my greatest pleasure in the book consists in the fact that, with Doctor Pascal for a mouthpiece, I am able to vindicate myself and to justify myself, and to defend my long series of novels. People, especially abroad, have accused me of being a pornographer. This I shall refute through Pascal. It has been said that all my characters are rascals—people of bad lives. Pascal will explain that this is not so. Zola has been charged with a lack of tender-heartedness. Pascal will show that this is not so. And he will do more than this. In defending my work against the accusations brought against it he will sum up the whole theory of atavism, which is the scientific problem which is the mainspring of the whole "Rougon-Macquart" series. He will have for the purpose of his exposition of this theory a family of five generations, composed of members of the most various professions—soldiers, priests, men of purse, painters, peasants—a whole section of society, each separate and distinct in character, but all united by the common bond of atavism. The novel will be a sermon on atavism, and will establish my theory that the day that men shall know how to master its

influence they will be what they are not—masters of their own destinies. And the conclusion of it all will be the philosophical one, which I have sought ever since the day on which I first took pen in hand to write the series, that we should have faith in life and confidence in Nature—not Rousseau's Nature, by the way—yes, that in spite of all that is sordid and cruel and ugly and incomprehensible in Nature, in spite of all the suffering and injustice of life, in spite of all that is bad and seems irremediable in the world, we should preserve confidence in Nature; that we should stake our hopes on effort and on work; and that surely, though we may not see it, we are pushing forward towards a certain end and object; that there is a field of hope in Nature, and that good will come out of all that is so bad; that justice will emerge from the slough of injustice; that a day of beauty will dawn after a night of hideous darkness; and that the result of all our efforts and our pains must surely be one that will reward the one and compensate for the other. Thus, the last scene of the book is a mother nursing a baby at her breast. Indeed, the last forty pages of my book are a description of a mother giving suck to her child. This child is the offshoot, the sole offspring of all those characters with whom the reader of the series is acquainted. Perhaps—it is indicated that there is hope for this—he may be its regenerator. This

child is the one green shoot on the top of an old and decayed tree, and it may be—I say it may be—that from this tiny shoot a splendid new growth may spring, full of life and health and beauty.'

'Doctor Pascal' was published in June of this year, after having appeared in serial form in a weekly periodical entitled 'La Revue Hebdomadaire.' Simultaneously there was published in England an excellent translation by Mr. Ernest Vizetelly under the same title, which appeared in serial form in the 'Weekly Times and Echo,' and in book form through Messrs. Chatto & Windus.

To celebrate the concluding volume of the series a *déjeuner* was given to Emile Zola by his publishers, Messrs. Charpentier & Fasquelle. It took place at a restaurant on one of the islands of the Bois de Boulogne, and was attended by everybody of note in Paris. It was to be noticed, however, that neither De Goncourt nor Alphonse Daudet, nor any other of the former company were present. The *déjeuner* was a very gay one, and the speeches with which it terminated were highly interesting. Charpentier first spoke, proposing the health of the hero of the day, and alluding in very delicate terms to Zola's former struggles. The moment was an affecting one, and it was seen that Madame Zola's eyes were filled with tears. Zola, in replying, paid the highest tribute to his publisher, and, addressing him as 'old

friend,' declared that he had worked as hard at the triumph of the 'Rougon-Macquart' series as he himself. 'For,' he said, 'if I have not ceased to write, you have not ceased to publish.' Referring to their business relations, he asked, 'Was there ever a contract between us? I do not know. I only know that never since the first has even the slightest shadow of a difficulty been between us.' The next speech was by Catulle Mendès, who, reminding Zola of the early quarrels between the Parnassians and the Naturalists, declared that, whilst he must still continue to consider poetry, as compared to the novel, infinitely superior as an art, he did not hesitate to describe Zola as one of the most illustrious of the contemporary glories of France. Zola replied by saying that he had always considered Mendès as a perfect artist and a good friend, and that as to the early quarrels to which allusion had been made, why should they be remembered, seeing that 'we find ourselves hand in hand at the end of the road.' Other speeches followed, Zola drinking one health to 'Work.' 'For,' he said, 'since one must drink to something, let me return to my old hobby, which is that true happiness lies in work.' General Yung, who was present, made rather a point by rising and saying, 'M. Zola, you have written "La Débâcle." Let us hope that you will write "La Victoire."' 'That is your affair,' answered Zola, and sat down.

M. Poincaré, the Minister of Fine Arts, was also present, and it was rumoured that he had the intention of presenting Zola after the banquet with the rosette of Officer of the Legion of Honour. This decoration was afterwards conferred on Zola on July 14 following, a circumstance which provoked a violent attack from Drumont in an article in the 'Libre Parole,' and even evoked a somewhat spiteful criticism from Rochefort. These attacks left Zola very calm in the serenity of his triumph, just as, when some years previously he had been created a Knight of the Legion of Honour, the protestation of his self-styled 'school' against his acceptance of this honour had left him indifferent.

He is now preparing his book on 'Lourdes,' which he began to write in October, after his visit to London, to attend the annual Conference of the Institute of Journalists. This book will be published simultaneously in Paris, London, and New York, having been purchased for America by Gordon Bennett, who paid Zola 800*l.* for the American serial rights alone of the tale.

It will be best understood to what a magnitude of financial success the starving poet of the rue Soufflot has reached when it is stated that, not long since, a Parisian speculator offered him 20,000*l.* down for the three novels that are to be written, 'Lourdes,' 'Paris,' and 'Rome,' although not a line of any one

of them was yet in existence—and that Zola preferred to refuse this offer.

Zola has realised all his ambitions save that of success as a dramatist, and that to a certain extent. It remains to be seen whether his present ambition of attaining a seat in the French Academy will also be realised. To the discussion of his chance of the same, and also the way in which this ambition of his is considered by those most directly concerned, the two concluding chapters of this book have been devoted.

CHAPTER XIX

AN UNREALISED AMBITION

In a conversation which I had with M. Zola in November 1890, he explained to me at some length not only his private reasons for desiring to become a member of the Academy, but his opinions on the utility of that institution. This conversation I now reproduce.

M. Zola began by saying that if the French Academy did not exist, he should be the first person to protest against the establishment of any such institution. 'The French Academy owes all that it possesses in the way of weight, attraction, and influence to its tradition. It is one of the institutions of France, and has the gloriole of its age about its head. The Academy,' he continued, 'renders services in two ways. It confers lustre on a certain number of mediocrities, and it consecrates the talents of a certain number of writers about whose merits the public mind is in doubt. It settles certain literary disputes. And besides that, the Academy gives us what men of letters no less than all other men desire in this life—that is to say, enjoyment. Our enjoyment as men of

letters is to know ourselves famous, to anticipate posterity, to have to-day the privilege and the pleasure of fame. Life is for enjoyment also. For mere living a man could exist on bread and the simplest dishes of meat; but it is not mere existence that a man desires—it is a certain refinement of life, a certain measure of enjoyment, and so cookery with all its refinements flourishes. And it is with this desire for triumph and enjoyment, and for this reward in my lifetime, that I am anxious to enter the Academy, but by no means for them alone. My chief reason is to obtain for the naturalist novel a consecration that it has never yet obtained. I am in some sort the literary heir and successor of a number of men of letters who all, for one reason or another, have never crossed the threshold of the Academy. It is their battle as much as my own that I am fighting: Balzac, who was refused over and over again; Flaubert, who died before his election could be compassed; De Goncourt, who withdrew; Daudet, who is sulking. You see that of all the novelists of a certain school I alone am left to carry out the fight for the definite consecration of a certain class of literature, about which, so far, that consecration not having yet been bestowed, the public mind is still in doubt whether to approve or to condemn. And then there is another thing that prompts me, who am otherwise indifferent to honours

and glory, to go on pushing my candidature against my own inclinations. As far as I am personally concerned, I should greatly prefer the quiet of some secluded corner. But I feel that the novel, as a form of literature, has not been treated by the French Academy as it deserves to be treated. The attitude of the Academy has all along been unjust towards what is nowadays one of the highest forms, if not the highest form, of literary expression. The novel is to-day the form that is chosen for the exposition of every kind of thought. From the pigmy that it was in the last century, it has grown to be a thing of monstrous size. The Academy still seems to look upon it as it was looked upon in the last century, when the novel had a very humble place at the table of the literary banquet, a place somewhere between the eclogue or idyl and the fable. The French Academy will not recognise the place that the novel has taken in literature, and the fact that it is the expression of everything that is said and of everything that is thought. Just consider the composition of the French Academy, the list of Academicians, and tell me whether the novel, the gigantic modern novel, is fairly represented. Is not the Academy of 1890 as unjust in its treatment of the novel as ever the old Academy was, which during the last century did not open its doors to a single novelist, and only began with Merimée? How many novelists sit in the

Academy to-day? Are there more than three? There is Feuillet and Cherbuliez and Marmier, and that is all. Is that a fair proportion of representation to accord to the form of literature which is as much the literary form of the nineteenth century as the tragedy was of the last century? I say it is not; and having the novel's cause and the novel's dignity at heart, I persist, and shall persist. Is it fair that there should be only three novelists in an assembly which counts I do not know how many dramatic authors? Why should dramatic art be so fully represented that even *vaudevillistes* have been admitted? You might search Paris through without being able to find one dramatic author who has been passed over, unless you except Henri Becque and Georges Ohnet, who is rather a novelist than a playwright. The Academy shows by this that she still clings to the last-century estimations of the values of the different literary forms.'

It may be noted here that since this conversation took place another novelist, at least, has been admitted to the Academy, and that is Pierre Loti.

I continued the conversation on this occasion by asking M. Zola what were his prospects of success. He said, 'Oh, I am not sanguine of immediate or indeed of eventual success. As a matter of fact, I believe that at next month's election M. de Freycinet will be elected. [Such, indeed, was the case.] In fact, I am

quite sure of it. He is just the man they want, because, being outside our literary quarrels, and being, by the traditions of the Academy, eligible as a politician, they can get out of the difficulty of choosing between us all by electing him. You see, I have no illusions on what awaits my application this time. But that is no matter. I shall offer myself again and again, so that my suit against the Academy may be fairly tried. I don't want it to be said hereafter that I did not give them every opportunity of admitting me, that I tried before the time, that I grew sulky, that I lost patience, and so on. No; the Academy shall have every opportunity of admitting me. I shall repeat my calls the number of times necessary. I shall repeat my representations to the various Academicians until it would be importunity to repeat them any further, and then I shall content myself with leaving cards on them at certain intervals, so as to show that I am still a candidate and still court election. I shall not tire. I am fifty now, and in good health, so that I have time, and the Academy has time too. Victor Hugo, who presented himself very much under the same circumstances as I am doing—that is to say, who by his application for membership wished the official consecration to be given to a literary school of which he was the head and the exponent, and which was as much discussed, blamed by some and praised by

others, as ever the naturalist school of novel has been—had to present himself four times. Why should I, then, hesitate at frequent application? The canvassing is not unpleasant. There is no indignity about it. The days of Villemain are over. Villemain, it was said, used to be disagreeable to certain candidates who called on him. At the most, I am told here and there that Monsieur le Duc This or Monsieur le Comte That cannot receive me; whereupon I ask when Monsieur le Duc or Monsieur le Comte will be able to receive me, leave my card, and call again. Certainly, here and there the reception is a frigid one. The Academician is not of my school, and will not by cordiality foster the hope that his vote is secured to me. But the courtesy of the Academicians is very great, such as is rarely met with elsewhere. And this being so, the visits are always pleasant, even when I have to call upon men to whom in the strife of the literary battle I have had to be as cruel as death. The politeness is delightful, and politeness is the first rule of the Academician's conduct. Thus, when M. de Freycinet has been elected, and I go, as I shall go, to call upon him in accordance with the obligation of a personal visit on each candidate, I know that the minute my card has been sent in I shall be received by M. de Freycinet, Academician, who as M. de Freycinet, President of the Council of Ministers, would

have kept me waiting three hours in a crowded chamber.'

'Is it true,' I asked, 'that the Academy, as described by Alphonse Daudet in his novel, is a hotbed of intrigue—political, social, and so forth?'

'In a certain sense it is,' answered M. Zola, 'although since the days of Thiers and of Guizot, who having fallen from power in the State amused themselves by continuing the art of government in the Academy, there have been great changes, and political intrigue may be said to be no longer carried on. There are, as you know, three parties in the Academy, the so-called *parti des ducs*, or *mondain* set, the University set, and the literary set, and being very fairly divided numerically, each party is helpless in itself, and must secure the votes of one of the other sets before it can accomplish any of its projects. So that there is in a way as much scheming and plotting as at the Palais Bourbon, where the Centre coquets now with the Right, and now with the Left. But it is all very harmless and very domestic intriguing.'

'And is it true that there are all kinds of wire-pulling for the election of candidates? Do not women espouse this or that cause, and further it with all their wiles?'

'Oh, the women!' cried M. Zola, with a slight shrug of his shoulders. 'Yes; there are women who

do take up this or that cause and try to make or to mar the election of a candidate. But then, to what does woman not turn her hand ? It is all trivial and of no importance, and the work of these Academician-manufacturing drawing-rooms amounts to practically nothing. All sorts of most complex considerations and interests influence elections—considerations political, literary above all, social even. The very qualifications of the predecessor who occupied the vacant *fauteuil* have much to do with the candidate's chances of filling his place.'

As will be remembered, about a month after this conversation took place M. de Freycinet was elected in preference to Zola, to whom only four votes were accorded by the Immortals. Since then four other elections have taken place, Pierre Loti, De Bornier, Thureau-Dangin, and Brunétière having been elected over M. Zola's head. At each fresh defeat of the chief of the naturalist school the outcry of the immense army of his admirers and followers has been loud against the Academy. Zola himself has been very philosophical about the matter.

I saw him after the double election of Bornier and Thureau-Dangin, and he then explained to me how his rejection was brought about, describing the forces that had worked for and against his election. As there is every reason to expect that for many years to come, at least, these opposing forces will not to any great extent be modified, his remarks on

his defeat on the occasion alluded to will be read with interest.

'It is the word "La Débâcle"'—our conversation took place some time after the publication of that famous book—'that frightened them,' said Zola. 'They would not have the author of a book which by its title seems to be a reflection of what is going on to-day as a consequence of the revelations anent the Panama affair. The Panama affair, you see, is to some extent a *débâcle* also. Yet, what was there in my book beyond an immense desire to speak the truth on the history of our disaster—to give, as it were, a sweep with the broom in a mass of filth, which is exactly, be it observed, what the Government of the Republic is doing in this Panama affair? Like myself, anent our disasters in 1870–71, the Government is trying to clean out the stables of Augeas, to give a vigorous stroke with the broom into a heap of filth.' M. Zola seemed in high spirits, and not in the least downcast over his rejection.

'I have a great number of opponents in the Academy,' he said. 'To begin with, there is what is called, though erroneously so, *le parti des ducs*, but which would be better designated as *la Droite*, who number ten voices, and who won't hear of me. I am not enough a society man, I presume, to suit them. There is, further, the clan of the *universitaires*, Taine and the rest of them, numbering from

ten to twelve voices; and to these must be added the party which may be described as that of the "Revue des deux Mondes," numbering from five to six voices. All these people are against me. My supporters are only the *écrivains purs*, and even amongst these there are one or two, such as the poets Leconte de Lisle and Sully Prudhomme, who, by reason of certain literary principles and prejudices, are not very favourably disposed towards my candidature. As a matter of fact, perhaps the only warm supporter that I have is M. François Coppée, who was kind enough to come up from Nice for the express purpose of voting in my favour. The other supporters of mine are somewhat lukewarm, and readily desert me at the second ballot, for, as you must have noticed, there is always a great diminution of votes given me between the first and the second ballots.

'The whole truth is this: the Academy refuses me because of my books. There is in France, just as there is in England, a mass of not very intelligent people who are at daggers drawn with me and my literature. Otherwise, the Academy has no objection to make against me. The Academicians admit that I am a respectable man, that I have no debts, that I am a brave *bourgeois* whose private life is decent and honourable, that I don't make too bad a figure in a drawing-room, and that I dress just like any-

body else. No: it is my books that bar the way. They are the fatal objection to my election. I was told that many of the Academicians think that my election would produce a scandal in foreign parts, so that to some extent I was sacrificed to the Puritan humbug of a mass of foreigners.'

'Were you not rather annoyed,' I asked, 'on hearing of the result? Did you not have, involuntarily and unconsciously perhaps, *un petit mouvement de dépit*?'

'Not a bit of it. On the contrary, I was seized by a great feeling of gaiety. I laughed heartily, and I will tell you why. It was because of the defeat of Berthelot. Not that I exulted in the defeat of Berthelot, who is a very illustrious *savant* and a most distinguished man, but because his defeat meant the defeat of a number of people who, having promised me their support, had transferred it to him. This is how the matter stood. At one time, when only Thureau-Dangin and myself were candidates, an arrangement was come to between my friends and *la Droite* by which the latter should be allowed to elect Thureau-Dangin, whilst my friends should be allowed to elect me. Then suddenly M. Berthelot proposed himself as a candidate. Now, amongst my friends there were Academicians who were more friends of M. Berthelot than friends of mine, and who accordingly deserted me and broke up the

arrangement. So that, on hearing that Berthelot had also been rejected, I couldn't help laughing, as I thought of the defeat of those who had deserted me. The elections may be described as a perfect triumph for the *droite* or *parti des ducs*. The two candidates that have been elected are both Orleanists and strong Catholics. It is a Conservative victory. The two elected candidates are historians of the old school, men of the time of Louis Philippe, with nothing that is young, nor ardent, nor modern about them. Bornier I know, and he is a very pleasant man, though very old-fashioned. As for Thureau-Dangin, I know nothing about him. I am told that he has written several books of history, but I have never read them. There are at least a dozen such historians in Paris.'

'You will continue, of course, to present yourself as candidate for the French Academy?' I asked.

'Of course. How can I do otherwise? I never give in. This is the fourth time that the Academy has rejected me, and the fifth seat that has been filled over my head. I must go on simply because I have gone so far. I might possibly have withdrawn after my first defeat; but it is now too late. I cannot admit myself to be defeated; I am forced to go on, and go on I shall. Thus yesterday, immediately after hearing of my double defeat, I sat down at once at my table here and wrote off to the Per-

petual Secretary to say that I maintained my candidature for the seat of Renan, and that I begged him to register my candidature for the seat of John Lemoinne. And so I shall continue. Each time that a vacancy occurs I shall write my little note and present myself as a candidate. I have twice paid formal visits, and twice have sent my card to the Academicians, so that I have done all that politeness demands, and I need now trouble myself no longer, nor lose any more time over the matter. Just my little letter each time that an Academician dies, and as soon as the usual month of mourning is over. You see, there is nothing very difficult or onerous about the course that I intend to pursue. It may be said of it, as of certain medical cures, that it can be practised with ease and comfort even when travelling. For my axiom is that since there is an Academy in France I ought to be a member of it. My little letter each time, and that is all.'

I suggested to M. Zola that to save trouble he might have these applications printed.

'No,' he answered: 'that would look as if I wanted to make fun of them, which I do not. I want to behave with perfect, with academical courtesy, yet to insist on my election, because I feel that I ought to be a member. It is a little literary and artistic problem that I am creating for the amusement of our great-grandchildren. For if in fifty years my

works still live, still have any significance, if my name has taken any place in French literature, people will ask themselves how it was that I was never admitted to the French Academy. Nor will the Academy be able to reply, as in the case of Balzac, "Because he died too early;" nor, as in the case of Flaubert and of others, "Because he never presented himself." Zola will have presented himself time and time again, and the Academy will have refused him as often, and it will be for the French Academy to justify itself towards posterity for this refusal. Personally, I don't expect to be elected for a very long time to come, if ever—though I shall go on presenting myself as a candidate until my death—unless I happen to write a book that particularly pleases them all, or unless the composition of the Academy is changed *de fond en comble*. No; I have come to look upon the Academy as upon a rich uncle in America, about whom one says, "Perhaps some day I shall inherit his money," and to whom one occasionally writes in consequence a nice little note, just to remind him of one's existence and of one's affection. The attitude of the Academy towards me for years to come will remain a total negation of my existence as a writer. At each election the Academicians will register by their votes against me an idealistic protestation against my works. *Cela durera tant que cela durera.* You have

but to consider the men who have been elected in my place, or rather in preference to me. Only one man of letters amongst them, and of that one it is already said that the Academy regrets her choice, the man being hardly what one can describe as *un homme académisable*.'

It will be interesting to watch whether the same energy and perseverance which have already enabled Emile Zola to overcome so many difficulties in life will also enable him to overcome the very evident prejudice that exists against his admission to the French Academy; one is inclined to think that it will.

CHAPTER XX

THE FRENCH ACADEMY

It is in France the ambition of every man of letters to become a member of the Academy; not that this distinction carries with it any commercial value—for a man's books certainly never have sold better or worse after his election to the French Academy than before—but because honorific distinctions are the delight of the Frenchman's soul, and because such an election immediately consecrates him the peer of the most considered, if not by any means the most important, of his contemporaries, closely or remotely in touch with literature. It may be remarked, however, that never has the profession of letters been held in the low esteem in France that for centuries it was in England, and to some extent still is. As Renan says in his admirable essay on the 'Histoire de l'Académie Française' written by Pellisson and D'Olivet, 'le gentilhomme d'autrefois, qui n'eût pas daigné recevoir le roturier plus riche que lui, traitait d'égal à égal l'homme de lettres pauvre.' In England,

it may be remarked, the only condition on which an author is allowed to enjoy any portion of public respect is that his *métier* or trade of letters shall produce him a revenue superior to the average income of the middle classes. In France it was only, as Renan says, when letters were taken up as a trade that the profession of literature began to sink in public estimation: 'Eût-il agi de la sorte,' he asks, referring to the *gentilhomme* above, 'si la fonction de l'homme de lettres eût été un métier comme un autre? L'opinion, qui est toujours fondée en quelque chose, n'accorde ce haut degré d'estime qui constitue la noblesse qu'à ce qui ne rapporte rien.'

It is indeed a patent of nobility, a brevet of aristocracy, that is conferred by admission to the French Academy—a very rare distinction, because of the extremely limited number, owing to the composition of the *compagnie* itself, who in one generation can ever hope to belong to it. And it is consequently the distinction of which the Frenchman is most proud, prouder even than of the highest grades of the Legion of Honour. It is recorded of the unhappy Ferdinand de Lesseps that down at his country house of La Chesnaye, where he is being kept from the knowledge of the terrible things which resulted upon the failure of the Panama Canal enterprise, his only regret is the French Academy. Again and again the poor old man is seen to rise in his chair and ask for

his laurel-embroidered uniform, so that he may be up and away and join the illustrious *compagnie*. Of all the glories that life brought to him—his presidencies of huge enterprises, his relations and personal friendships in all the Courts of Europe, his brilliant position in Parisian society—this membership of his is what he alone desires.

M. Emile Zola, as will be seen from his own words, reproduced in another chapter, professes to desire his admission to the French Academy, not on any grounds of personal distinction, but because his election would definitely consecrate the particular class of literature which he to some extent created, and which he has certainly popularised in the highest degree.

It is rather difficult to understand how, as long as the traditions of the past, at least, are preserved in the French Academy, this hope can ever be realised, especially when it is remembered that it is not the man of letters, but the literature which he has produced, that to his thinking should be thus distinguished. The very fact that M. Zola's books have had such immense sales, that in this respect his popularity has been definitely consecrated, is perhaps the chiefest stumbling-block in his way into the Academy. Its membership was never reserved to men of letters exclusively—in fact, in its earlier days the proportion of writers to mere men of the world

was a small one. It was in these days, according to Renan, 'le temps où un joli quatrain fait par un gentilhomme était un titre académique.' The professional man of letters never had a place under the cupola of the Academy. For, to quote Renan again, it has always been held by the Academy that if letters are a profession—that is to say, a money-getting concern—they are of all professions the lowest and the last. 'Du moment,' writes Renan in his exposition of the guiding principles of the academical mind, 'que la carrière des lettres peut être embrassée comme lucrative, elle perd toute sa noblesse.' The chances, then, have always been against an author whose works have sold by hundreds of thousands of copies, and who in consequence may by the Academy have been considered to be working at letters not from an elevated ideal of the nobility of his occupation, but for the sake of lucre.

I remember a long conversation that I had on one occasion, some time after Zola had first proclaimed his intention of applying for admission to the Academy, with Taine. Taine, it may be remarked, was one of the Academicians who was most opposed to Zola's candidature. His remarks to me on the spirit that has always guided the Academy in its selections give the clearest comprehension of this spirit, and will show what chances M. Zola may be

considered to have of eventual admission as long as this spirit remains the same.

'You must remember,' said M. Taine, 'that the Academy is at one and the same time a literary institution and a club. Yes, very much of a club, where men of letters of different schools can meet on a field of conciliation and in an atmosphere of tolerance. A courtliness reigns there which elsewhere has not survived the age of courtliness. The courtliness develops that atmosphere of tolerance of which I have spoken, and which is an excellent thing. Men who disagree on every point outside, and are, if I may use the expression, at daggers drawn elsewhere, meet there as men meet at a club, forgetting only the faults and seeing only the good things in each other's work. And it is an advantage to be brought to study what is excellent in the work of your neighbour. The Academy, as a club, is also a great addition to social life. Its value as such cannot be contested. It was this feature of the Academy that so much attracted Matthew Arnold. Some people may laugh at the putting of literature into powder and peruke, or, rather, into gold-embroidered coats with rapiers at the side, but it is certainly an immense addition to the prestige of literature in France.

'Some say that this prestige in France would have been greater, or, rather, would seem greater

in the eyes of the world, had certain men—who, by the way, would have looked remarkably well in gold-embroidered coats with rapiers at their sides—not been excluded.

'That is an unjust accusation against the Academy. Let us examine what men have been excluded. What well-known names can be brought up against us? Molière, to begin with. But who is ignorant of the prejudice that existed at his time against actors? How could an actor—for it was the actor that was considered in his case, and not the dramatist—be admitted into what was as much a club as a literary institution? The times, not the Academy of the time, should be blamed for Molière's exclusion. Then there is Beaumarchais. But what was Beaumarchais' social standing? Was he not the typical Bohemian? Were there not rumours about his abusing his *entrées* into Society? The Academician had to be above any such reproach, and with his talent his private life had also to be considered. You have a number of literary clubs in London. Look at the first, and ask yourself what chance of admission a man would have if it were known that he was leading a life which was against the social ethics of England, however distinguished he might be as a writer. Balzac? Well, there is no name whose absence from the rolls of the Academy we all more regret. But the Academy cannot well be

blamed for this exclusion. It was Balzac's untimely death that excluded him. But for that he would assuredly have been admitted. It happened, with cruel misfortune, just at the very time when he had extricated himself from those troubles which had rendered his admission before a difficult matter. Had he lived a year or two longer he would surely have been admitted. Then there is Flaubert, another name that we miss, and with the keenest regret: Flaubert, the author of the greatest novel that has been written in France since Balzac's death. But in Flaubert's case, again, it was death that barred the door of the Academy. Dumas *père*? Ah, poor Dumas! An immense genius, but not possible as a member of the French Academy. It would not have been his place, nor would he have been at ease there. Dumas had much of the negro in his exuberant temperament—a Bacchus, a Silenus, a volcano, a fountain *à jet continu*, making fortunes and devouring them, producing books by the hundred, taking here and giving there, at rest never, a spirit of unrest if ever there was one. He was a man whom it was most difficult to admit to an institution where a certain equanimity of temperament is an indispensable qualification. Don't forget that the Academy is a club, and that at a club exuberances must be toned down, a certain *rapport* must be established among the members. Look how utterly poor Eugène Sue

failed as a member of the Jockey Club. A man may be a great and most admirable genius, and yet not be suited for the membership of a club. And at the Academy a man whose nature will not allow him to tone down his individuality sufficiently to bring himself into harmony with the other members of his club, is not a man to be made a member. There are several men who, having entered the Academy, could never make themselves at home there. The atmosphere of the place could never agree with them. Look at Victor Hugo, who during the last years of his life came to the Academy once or twice, only, each year. He was not at home in a club where the greatest equality reigns. Accustomed to being treated as an idol at home and outside, he felt utterly out of place in such an assembly. When people accuse the Academy of excluding such-and-such a man they forget its dual character, and see only the literary institution where the club co-exists. Every club has certain principles by which it is guided in the selection of its members. Why was Théophile Gautier excluded?—Théophile Gautier, whom I can remember sitting just where you are sitting now, and asking me that very same question. Do you suppose that in excluding him there was a single Academician who was blind to his literary excellence? Not one. But it was known that poor Gautier led a most irregular life, was always in debt,

and had connections of which the world did not approve. As a group of literary men we bowed to the genius; as a circle of men of the world and of gentlemen we closed the door against him. To say that we are hypercritical or over-exacting in our selections is most unjust. Let a man fulfil certain conditions, and his admission, if time and place be favourable, is assured. Look at Maître Rousse, whose literary product consisted of about sixty pages of prose. We needed no more than these sixty pages to prove to us that from a literary standpoint he was as eligible as from a social point of view he was a desirable inmate of the French Academy. We are prepared to admit any man on the sight of merely two pages of his work, all the other conditions being fulfilled. But they must be fulfilled. It is a *sine quâ non*. We must be satisfied that he knows the French language, for which the sight of two pages suffices, and we must be satisfied that his way of life qualifies him for membership with men against whom no reproach can be made by the world.'

From the foregoing remarks of the Academician who was, perhaps, the most opposed of any of the *compagnie* to the admission of M. Zola, it will be seen that the latter is right in saying that it is his books, and his books alone, that bar his entrance to the French Academy. For Taine himself would have admitted that Zola fulfilled the conditions of member-

ship on which, in the recorded conversation, the hostile Academician dwelt at such length. His life is orderly and quiet, his manners are polite, his temperament is quiet and reserved. But his books—his books! It should be remembered that one of the principal functions of the French Academy—here I am again quoting from what Taine said to me on that occasion—is to play the watch-dog over the French language, acting as a brake on its too rapid development.

'The Dictionary of the Academy,' continued M. Taine, 'our much mocked-at Dictionary, is a veritable bulwark against the army of neologisms that assail the tongue.' Renan also, in the paper above referred to, dwelt upon this function of the French Academy. 'D'ailleurs,' he writes, 'se rappeler que l'un des objets de la fondation de l'Académie était de purger la langue des scories que le pédantisme de l'école et du barreau y avaient introduites, écrire comme les gens qui parlaient bien, voilà ce qu'elle essayait d'enseigner par ses exemples et ses leçons. Il était donc essentiel qu'elle fît une large part dans son sein aux hommes qui représentaient le ton de bonne compagnie.'

Well, if this be still one of the functions of the French Academy, and if this tradition be still preserved, it is not difficult to understand, when one remembers certain passages in 'La Terre,' in 'Nana,' in

'L'Assommoir' above all, or indeed when one considers any one of these books from a philological point of view, why the Academy should turn so cold a shoulder on their author. And, strangely enough, Zola takes especial pride in 'L'Assommoir,' in the writing of which he largely consulted Alfred Delvau's 'Dictionnaire de la Langue Verte,' or slang dictionary, as a philological work; writing, as he does, in the Preface to this book:—

'L'Assommoir est à coup sûr le plus chaste de mes livres. Souvent j'ai dû toucher à des plaies autrement épouvantables. La forme seule a effaré. On s'est fâché contre les mots. Mon crime est d'avoir eu la curiosité littéraire de ramasser et de couler dans un moule très travaillé la langue du peuple. Ah! la forme! là est le grand crime! Des dictionnaires de cette langue existent pourtant, des lettrés l'étudient et jouissent de sa verdeur, de l'imprévu et de la force de ses images. Elle est un régal pour les grammairiens fureteurs. N'importe, personne n'a entrevu que ma volonté était de faire un travail purement philologique, que je crois d'un vif intérêt historique et sociale.'

'On s'est fâché contre les mots.' I believe that if the truth were known this fact would explain the hostility of the French Academy against Emile Zola.

Even François Coppée, admitted by Zola himself to be his warmest supporter in the Academy, insisted,

in a conversation that I had with him at his house in the rue Oudin, on this abhorrence of the Academicians of anything that at all approaches the *langue verte*, or *argot*. 'As a matter of fact,' he said, 'we Academicians, for all the glory of our palm-leaved coats and swords, are after all but the mere *greffiers-scribes* of the transformations of the French language. It is our duty, and almost our only duty, to register such new words as have stood the test of a certain number of years of usage, and to eliminate slang. Thus, for instance, the word *pschutt* a while ago was so much the general expression for the word *élégant* that everyone thought that the day would come when it too would be admitted to that 'Almanac de Gotha' of the French language, the Dictionary of the Academy. But time has proved that the determination of the Academy with regard to *pschutt* was right, for it is a word that one never hears now except amongst those who cling to any silly slang word that they may have learned.'

Again: 'The Academy has never influenced a single writer for good or for bad. All it has done is to supply the writer with the words that he may use without the reproach of using slang. It has fitted him with the sword, as it were; it has not taught him how to fence, and has never wished to teach him.'

Speaking on the distribution of prizes, M. Coppée said in reference to a volume of poems by Gabriel

Vicaire, which had recently been crowned by the Academy, that though they had found something to condemn in the way of too passionate utterance, the beauty of its style had prevailed, and the book had been crowned. This is another proof that it is style and use of language rather than subject or doctrine that the Academy considers in passing judgment on a work of literature or on a literary man. It may be noted, too, *en passant*, that for some years past Emile Zola has not repeated any of his philological experiments. 'La Débâcle,' for instance, or 'Le Docteur Pascal,' do not contain many words, if any, which could not be found in the Dictionary of the French Academy.

I took the opportunity, when conversing with François Coppée on the subject of the French Academy, to ask him his opinion on Emile Zola's candidature, which he gave in connection with a question of mine as to the dignity or indignity of personal candidature and canvassing. 'As regards the indignity of personal candidature,' he said, 'there is nothing more unjust than to lay the blame of this on the Academy. Why, one of the first rules of the Academy statute-book is: All personal visits to Academicians by candidates are forbidden. But that is a law which is made to be broken. A candidate who should respect this law would stand no chance of election; but there is nothing of indignity in an

action which is necessary. You desire to be elected, and you call on those whom you think may support you. There is nothing more natural than that. And, of course, we canvass. Thus, I am myself a warm supporter of the candidature of Emile Zola, and when he was put up for the Academy I went to all my colleagues and said, "Here is a man of gigantic intellect; we must admit him." But each voted according to his own opinion, and Zola only received four votes.'

Some days after my conversation with François Coppée, Vice-Chancellor of the French Academy, I met M. Pailleron, also an Academician, and had a long talk with him on the subject which I was then investigating. M. Pailleron being certainly one of those who from the outset have voted against Zola's candidature, and who is certain to continue doing so to the end, his remarks are pertinent to this examination of the chances that the latter has of seeing what is now the ambition of his life realised.

M. Pailleron was equally emphatic on the point that the principal function of the French Academy is to act as a brake on the French language. To quote his own words: 'The Academy performs an important function in acting as a brake on the too rapid development of the French language. That is why it is so absurd to joke about the eternal non-completion of the Dictionary of the Academy. How can it ever

be completed? Does not the French language change day after day? The function of the French Academy —they are fools who say the contrary—is not to fix the French language, but to take cognizance of its gradual changes. Words rapidly lose in value, especially in this age of exaggeration in everything. This is the noisy time of journalism, the time of sonorous phrases, and a word that a year ago was, so to speak, worth in emphasis five francs, may to-day be hardly worth twopence halfpenny. I can remember a time when one would say of a bad thing that it was bad, *mauvais*. To-day the mildest qualification that we should apply to the same thing would be the word *infecte*. And so language develops, till one wonders where our children will find emphasis enough for their purposes. It is to register these gradual changes in the language, to accept them after they have stood the test of usage, that the Academy is a useful institution. It gives the hall-mark to each development of the language.'

In answer to a remark of mine, that surely good men have often been passed over by the Academy, as, for instance, Balzac and Dumas, M. Pailleron said:—

'Certainly, as far as literary merit went, both Balzac and Dumas should have been elected. The objection against them both was that both were bankrupt traders. Yes, both Dumas and Balzac went

into business other than literature, and failed. The Academy could not open its doors to bankrupt traders. The French Academy can only receive the most honourable.'

'Daudet,' I remarked, 'has told us different things.'

'Daudet's book is rubbish,' said M. Pailleron. 'It is a novel, and nothing else. One doesn't go to a novelist for facts, but for romance, and "L'Immortel" is nothing else. Daudet's attitude it is easy to understand. He is piqued at not having been received with open arms, and goes about saying, "The Academy—I never wanted to belong to it." I like Zola's attitude very much better. He says frankly, "I do want to get in." He sees in his mind's eye the immense impetus to the sale of his books that his election and his membership of the Academy would bring about, and that is why he is so persistent.'

I did not comment on this remark of M. Pailleron's at the time, and if I quote it here it is because it illustrates the hostility that is felt in what Zola calls the *parti des universitaires* against his candidature.

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By EDMUND YATES.

The Forlorn Hope. | Land at Last.
Castaway.

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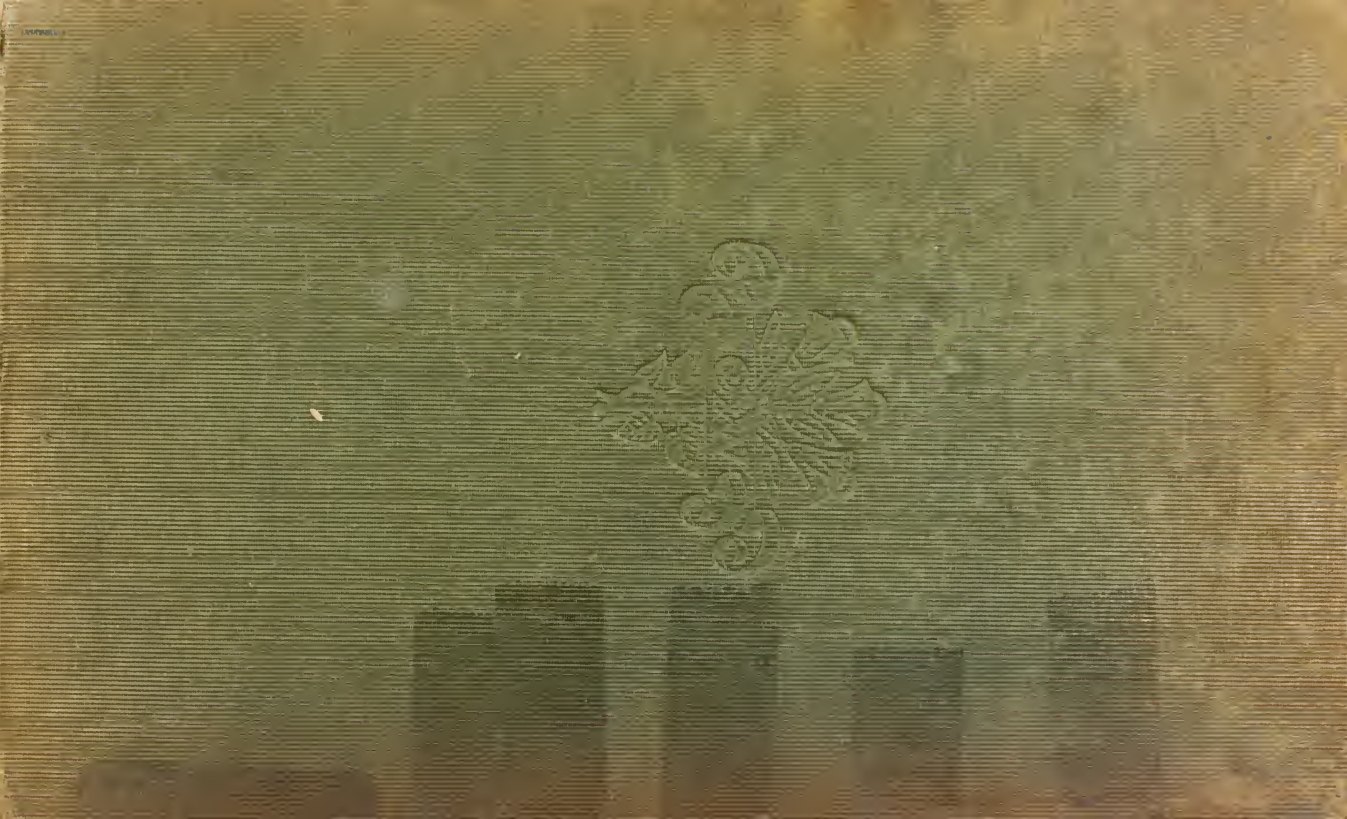
Zola's
Plot formula - p. 134-7

Contes à Ninon 1864
La Confession de Claude 1865
Les Mystères de Marseille 1867 ng
Thérèse Raquin 1867 Brux
(first use of word "naturalisme"
in title of 2nd edition preface)
Madeleine Férat 1868
pour ex. Zola, mêmes
La Fortune des Rougon 1871
La Curée 1872
Le Ventre de Paris
La Conquête de Plassans
La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret 1874
Son Excellence Eugène Rougon 1875
L'Assommoir 1877
Page d'amour
Nana 1880
Pot-Bouille 1881
Au Bonheur des Dames 1883
La Joie de vivre 1884
Germinal 1885
L'Œuvre 1886
La Terre 1887

(genealogical tree "Les Rougon-Macquart" formed in "Une Page d'Amour" and later, in "La Fortune des Rougon")